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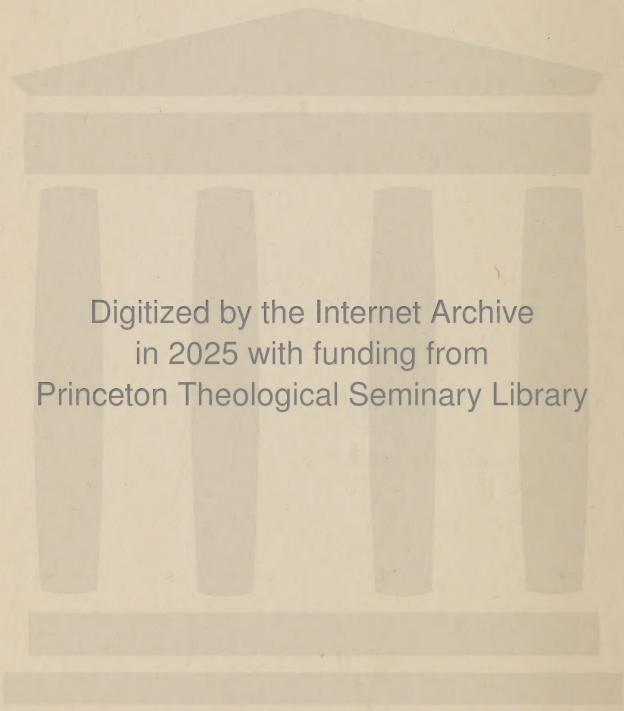
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SAINTS WITHOUT HALOS

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Saints Without Halos

by

ALVIN E. MAGARY

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SAINTS WITHOUT HALOS

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Preface

THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS NOT MEANT TO BE A TEXTUAL puzzle nor a battleground for rival exegetes. Neither was the purpose of its writers to create a standard treatise on systematic theology nor to provide for the theologians a source of proof texts for their contending creeds. Their purpose, like that of their Master, was completely practical. As he spoke to men, "not as the scribes," but in the terms of common life, so these men meant to write plainly, for plain people, in the plain language of their time.

It was inevitable that with the errors of copyists, the changes that occur in the meaning of words, and the difficulty of translating the speech of one age and nation into the language of another problems should arise, but the book itself is no problem. With all the imperfections that result from the fallibility of men its meanings are clear to any reader who applies to it a reasonable degree of intelligent and unbiased attention. We miss much of its beauty, its truth, and its monumental common sense because we open it with our minds stuffed full of what men have said about it rather than with our minds receptive to what it has to say for itself.

It is true that the New Testament writers dealt with the soundless mysteries of God, but they dealt with them as they are present in the lives of ordinary people. The reason their writings are so vital after centuries of change is that they were written with actual, living people in view—people whose needs and aspirations, troubles and triumphs, sins and virtues are the same today as they were when Peter threw himself at the

feet of Christ in remorseful despair, and when Paul called on God to deliver him from the inner conflicts that tore his life apart and to give him peace.

It is my hope that these chapters, written amid the duties and distractions of a busy city pastorate, may help the reader to know more intimately the people of the New Testament and to appreciate more fully the unique achievement of its writers. No men have more clearly revealed themselves in their writings; none have given so comprehensive a view of the nature of man and the being of God; nor, among all the inspired visionaries of history, have any spoken with such power to persuade the human heart.

In my studies of these people I have taken the New Testament, generally, as it has come down to us, without troubling myself too much about such critical questions as have little bearing on the practical purpose and use of the book. Where such questions seem to have interest for the ordinary reader, I have ventured to touch upon them, but as F. W. Farrar said in the preface of his famous *Life of Christ,* written in 1874, "Writing as a believer to believers, as a Christian to Christians, surely, after nearly nineteen centuries of Christianity, anyone may be allowed to rest a fact of the Life of Jesus on the testimony of St. John without stopping to write a volume on the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel."

So far as the New Testament is affected by modern criticism, no one who loves it need be alarmed. It is astonishing that, considering the discoveries that have been made and the searching scholarship that has been devoted to every detail of the text, with its authorship and history, the book comes to us as it came to our fathers, its beauty unmarred and its authority unshaken.

ALVIN E. MAGARY

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I

New Testament People

THE NEW TESTAMENT KNOWS NOTHING OF SUCH PERSONS AS St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, or St. John. It tells us about a tax collector called Matthew, a young fellow named Mark, and a Greek physician named Luke. In the King James Version of the Bible the Fourth Gospel is headed "The Gospel According to Saint John." The three epistles by the same author are ascribed to just plain John. We have taken a long step toward a true understanding of these writings when we realize that "just plain John" was the real man.

According to the ecclesiastical definition a saint is "a person whose extraordinary holiness and heroic virtue have attracted the notice of the Universal Church and who has been placed on the list of God's chosen followers." Or in more theological terms, "one who is in enjoyment of the beatific vision and has been presented by the Church for the public worship of the faithful." There are no such persons in the New Testament. Its writers do not reveal themselves, nor do they portray their fellow disciples as anything more than ordinary men and women. Certainly they never suggest that any of them should be "presented for the worship of the faithful." We shall apprehend the history of the early Church only as we understand that the "company of persons . . . in all about a hundred and twenty" which met in the upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost were people such as you might find gathered together in any church next Sunday.

To many people the men and women of the New Testament are as unreal as the stone effigies that adorn the façade of a medieval church. Commenting on Renan's *Life of Jesus,* Albert Schweitzer said, "The gentle Jesus, the pretty Maries, the refined Galileans who make up the retinue of the charming carpenter have been taken from the windows of a shop in the Place St. Sulpice."

The elaborate rituals, the ornate vestments of the clergy, and the costly architecture of the churches tend to obscure the simple, human reality of Jesus and his followers. We respect the traditional practices of the Church, and we respond to the ancient pageantries of religion. Few would be so zealous for simplicity in worship as not to yield to the influence of a cathedral in which men and women have offered prayer to God for eight hundred years or of a church in which their forefathers have met for generations. Nevertheless, nothing could be less like the assemblies of apostolic times than the solemn ceremonies in which a group of clergymen, arrayed in ecclesiastical robes, march in procession behind a choir of surpliced boys, surrounded by the art and architecture of a million-dollar church, all athrob with the thunder of a mighty organ.

How much of all this is spiritual inspiration and how much is mere esthetic satisfaction, we do not venture to judge. Some of it, we suppose, came down from ancient Judaism, some from the pagan worship of the Greeks, and some was picked up and adapted from local customs as the Christian faith made its way among the heathen. No part of it came from the New Testament.

The most deplorable occurrences in the Church's history were possible because the reality of its founder and the humanity of his followers became obscured in the trumped-up glorification with which men sought to honor them. In the

story of the Crucifixion we are told how Christ's tormentors dressed him in a purple cloak and pretended to do homage to him as a king. When they grew tired of their brutal joke, says Mark, "they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him." The Man on the Cross, then, was not arrayed in the masquerade of temporal power in which the Church through all its history has insisted on dressing him. Men will always know and love him best, not in the vestments of ecclesiastical display, but in the clothes of the Galilean carpenter. And it is when we think of Peter, Andrew, James, and John, as they left their nets to follow him, wearing neither robes nor halos, but dressed in their old fishermen's garments, that they come to us as real people.

The "saints" of the New Testament were the rank and file of the early Church. Those whom Paul calls the "saints" at Jerusalem were poor people suffering from famine to whom he and Barnabas were carrying help from the churches in the north. The saints to whom he addressed his letters were the people of the churches at Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, and Philippi. "To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints," he writes, and, "To . . . all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia."

These people disagreed, quarreled, and went astray. There is no problem of the Christian pastor today that did not test the wisdom and patience of the leaders of the apostolic church. Nor is there any temptation to which the preacher of today is susceptible that did not rankle in the hearts of the Peters, Pauls, and Timothys who first bore the message of the Cross to Judea, Samaria, and "to the end of the earth."

They are all here in this book, the common people of God. They are presented with no attempt to cover nor excuse their human frailties. Ananias and his wife love their money;

Diotrephes wants to be the church boss; Demas loves this present world and falls from grace; and Hymanaeus and Alexander make "shipwreck of their faith" by rejecting conscience. All the problem children of the faith were there in the early Church, and they are still with us. And with them are sturdy souls like the choice Christian Rufus, the Colossian gentleman Philemon, the "wellbeloved" Gaius, and many others. The list is long of those who stood by in those first crucial years of the Church's history. They were the devoted nucleus that has been at the heart of every church since the beginning. Of them every aging parson might write, as Paul wrote of his friends at Philippi, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you."

These were the people of the New Testament "called to be saints." As we read through the book, we meet with more than two hundred persons who are specifically named or otherwise identified. In addition to these individuals multitudes of men and women of all sorts and conditions pass before us. Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, publicans, paupers, princes, politicians, prostitutes, soldiers—people of every class and from everywhere crowd the pages of this most profoundly human of all books. In the city of Brooklyn, where this is being written, multitudes like them crowd the streets. They shout at the baseball games at Ebbets Field; they work and drink and gamble and pray to God. Like those of whom Luke writes who had come to Jerusalem "from every nation under heaven," and who listened to the first Christian sermon of which we have record and were "cut to the heart," they are the material of which the kingdom of God is built.

The Church has depended for its establishment, defense, and support, not on a spiritual aristocracy composed of priests and "persons of extraordinary holiness and heroic virtue," but on

the great democracy of the faith, the witness of the truth in the hearts of ordinary men and women.

One recalls the words of James Anthony Froude, the British historian:

> Christianity has abler advocates than its professed defenders in those quiet and humble men and women who, in the light and strength of it, live holy, beautiful, and self-denying lives. So long as the fruits of the spirit continue to be visible in charity, in self-sacrifice, in those graces which raise human creatures above themselves, thoughtful persons will remain convinced that with them, in some form or other, is the secret of truth.

These were the people of the New Testament. They are the people of today in whose simple faith and unpretentious piety the enduring strength is found. They are the saints without halos.

2

Disreputable Saints

JESUS HAD A LIKING FOR LOW COMPANY. IF THE PREACHER OF today were to make intimate friends of people like some of those who belonged to the apostolic circle and are now celebrated as "saints," the devout would worry and the ungodly would jeer.

Among the followers of Jesus were men and women who would be avoided by respectable Jews. That a man who claimed to speak for God admitted such riffraff to his friendship was regarded by pious persons as a scandal. When the Pharisees remonstrated with him for associating with such people, he replied that his concern was not with respectable observers of the law like themselves, but with sinners and outcasts. Then he added a statement that would cause some gnashing of teeth among the pillars of the Church today. "I say to you," he said, "the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." This man, they said, is the friend of publicans and sinners, eating and drinking with them. He must be a glutton and a drunkard himself.[1] Their conclusion was wrong, but it was not unreasonable.

It is thus that the world judges men. "But [he] made himself," says the familiar version of Paul's letter to the Philippians, "of no reputation." That is a faulty rendering of the Greek text, but it is true to the fact. Jesus deliberately subjected himself to the judgment of conventional respectability

[1] See Matt. 21:31; 11:9; 9:12.

as a disreputable person. Any man who imitated him today in this respect would bring upon himself precisely the same judgment.

From the time of Euripides until now the world has agreed that a man's character is revealed by the company he keeps. "Associate yourself with men of good quality," wrote George Washington, "if you would esteem your own reputation." That is sound, worldly advice. When Gladstone and his wife interested themselves in helping women of the class of Mary Magdalene, British respectability was shocked. His political rivals made capital of it as the Pharisees did with Jesus. They urged upon the voters that there must be something wrong with a man who would extend a helping hand to a bad woman. The return of such a man, they said, would defile the immaculacy of British politics. Even the apostle Paul, liberal and unorthodox as he was, warned his Corinthian friends to be careful in choosing their associates. "What partnership have righteousness and iniquity?" he asked. "Or what fellowship has light with darkness? . . . Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?" He took liberties with a passage in Isaiah in which the prophet urges the people to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem. "Therefore," he wrote, "come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean." [2]

This is good, common-sense counsel, such as most of us would give to young people. No doubt it was called for by conditions in the Corinthian church, but it does not reflect Paul's usual attitude toward the heathen, and it certainly was not the way of Jesus, who did not shrink from the touch of a leper and among whose intimate friends were people who would not be permitted to step across the threshold of a typical Jewish home. Along with men like Nathanael, who

[2] See also I Cor. 5:9-13.

was "an Israelite . . . in whom is no guile," there were apostate Jews, racketeers, prostitutes, and others who were in luck if they kept out of jail. Rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief—the eminent scholar Nicodemus, the blind beggar Bartimaeus, the sinful woman of Magdala, the tax collector, the thief on the cross, along with a host of plain, decent, hard-working folks—these were the people to whom Paul wrote as "all the saints." There was room for them all in the heart of Christ.

Matthew and Zacchaeus were publicans. In English law the term includes innkeepers, winesellers, and bartenders. The New Testament publican is usually assumed to have been the hired man of a Roman tax collector. His employer robbed the people and cheated the government, and he robbed the people and cheated his employer. We know that Matthew was of this class because when we first meet him, he is at the tax or customs office, probably as a collector of imposts on the traffic between Capernaum and the cities of the Decapolis. The makers of the Revised Standard Version have chosen to discard the term "publican" in favor of "tax collector," but it is unlikely that the word was applied to men of only one occupation. The Latin word *publicanus* stood for any government employee. It is probable that the Greek *telones* was used in a similarly general way. Publicans appear too often in the story and fill too large a place in the thought of the writers of the Gospels to warrant the assumption that they were all collectors of taxes. Any Jewish agent of the Roman government would be detestable to the patriotic Jew as any French agent of the Nazi invaders was detestable to the patriotic Frenchman. Even Jesus regarded the publican as having lost his standing as a Jew and as having become outcast as a heathen. Yet he admitted at least one such man into the inmost circle of his friends.

Mary of Magdala is often identified with the "woman of

the city, who was a sinner," who anointed the feet of Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee. Churches are now named for her, and she is celebrated as a saint. We shall not understand the relation of Jesus to such people unless we cease to see them through a glow of romantic piety. The woman of Magdala is the prostitute of New York or Chicago. She may be the luxurious courtesan or the abject lurker in the city street; there is only one name for her in the New Testament. Persons with "any esteem for their reputations" would be careful to shun such a woman. In the Church of Christ she would get many a sidelong glance, however sincere her repentance; but Jesus welcomed her among his followers.

Peter no doubt was a decent, hard-working man, but we may be sure that when he cried out to Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man," he was not thinking of himself as a helpless sufferer with all mankind from the primal disobedience of Adam. It was not Adam's sin he had in mind, but his own. So Paul in calling himself "the foremost of sinners" is not indulging in theological rhetoric. Nowhere in literature is there so poignant a confession of sin as his self-revelation in the seventh chapter of his letter to the Roman church. So it was with the early followers of Jesus. They loved much, as he said of the repentant woman, because they had been forgiven much.

The people of the New Testament are the mill run of humanity. The saints were sinners who had found in the faith of Christ a way of hope. Christian history has been enriched with the lives of men and women of spiritual genius who have lived from childhood on a level of piety and moral excellence never attained by the rest of us. But it is the glory of Christianity that most of its heroes have been people who knew, as Paul knew, the bitterness of the conflict between the lusts of the body and the aspirations of the soul.

When Paul addressed his letter "to all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints," he was not thinking of the kind of people religious art has so often pictured with clasped hands and faces simpering with conscious virtue. He plainly says that some of the saints had been adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, or drunkards.[3] The religious aristocracy of the time of Jesus had nothing to offer such people. "This crowd," said the Pharisees, "who do not know the law, are accursed." Voltaire had the same idea. "Philosophy," he said, "is not meant for the people. The rabble today is in everything like the rabble of the last four thousand years. We have never bothered to enlighten cobblers and maid servants. That is work for apostles." Indeed it is!

From the beginning it has taken all kinds of people to make the Church of Christ. Without all kinds of people it cannot be the Church of Christ. It is said that you "can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." Perhaps not, but Christian history proves that the noblest character may rise out of the deepest degradation when touched by the spirit of Christ. How often the drama of the prodigal son is re-enacted in real life only God knows. Whatever faults may appear in the history of the Church, it is the one institution that has never departed from faith in the capacity of the rag, tag, and bobtail of humanity to reach the heights of moral heroism and spiritual beatitude.

Gibbon said that the religion of Jesus prevailed because it gave new hope to people in an age when hope was their greatest need. What men needed then, they desperately need now. There was plenty of religion in the time when the Christian Church was rooting itself throughout the Roman Empire. Judaism had a temple which was one of the world's wonders.

[3] I Cor. 6:9-11.

Its synagogues were to be found everywhere. Greek mysteries were flourishing. Religion was a pillar of the Roman state. Belief in the supernatural was universal. As Paul said in the beginning of his speech to the Athenians on Mars Hill, there was no want of religion in those days. What Christianity gave men was a new faith in man, in his worth to God, his capacity for noble living, and his ageless destiny.

So it is with us. A century ago Matthew Arnold, looking back from the comfortable security of British upper-class life, could congratulate himself and his generation on the difference between his little world of Victorian privilege and propriety and the days of the Caesars.

> Perceiv'st thou not the change of day?
> Ah! Carry back thy ken,
> What, some two thousand years! Survey
> The world as it was then!
> . . . . . .
>
> On that hard Pagan world, disgust
> And secret loathing fell;
> Deep weariness and sated lust
> Made human life a hell.

We cannot quote those lines today with the complacency of our fathers. We are not by any means sure that there was any horror in the world of the first Christian century that has not been matched or surpassed in our own time. There was a time, according to the writer of Genesis, when "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth," when the thoughts of men were only evil all the time, and when destruction was loosed upon the world in consequence. Paul writes of his own time as if God had become disgusted with humanity. "God gave them up," he says, "in the lusts of their hearts."

So in this generation with its revelations of the bestiality of

which civilized men are capable many have lost faith in the possibility, or even the desirability, of salvaging the human race. As Mark Twain said, at a time when the human scene was less revolting than it has been in recent years, "There are times when one would like to hang the whole human race and finish the farce." "There is nothing left for a thinking man," said a British philosopher, "but to take refuge in a profound despair."

In this age of disappointment, disillusionment, and disbelief in the possibilities of human life it may cheer and reassure us to recall the radiant faith with which the early followers of Jesus looked, not only up to God, but abroad upon mankind. Though sin abounded, they believed that grace abounded more. Jesus, wrote Matthew, "went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom." He taught his disciples to pray for the coming of a new social order in which the will of God should be done among men, and he said that some of those who heard him speak should not die before they saw signs of the coming of this "kingdom of God." Thus his gospel rested not only on his conception of the being of God, but also on his faith in the worth, the moral and spiritual nature, and the susceptibility to being what he called "born again" of the most sinful and abandoned of human creatures.

So Jesus had a liking for low company. He did not look for the redemption of society to come from a few choice spirits. In the publican, the prostitute, the rich man, and the beggar at the rich man's gate he discerned, as John says, the same "power to become children of God." He spoke with "authority, and not as the scribes" because he understood people, had shared their common life, and appreciated as no other had ever done their yearnings toward the beautiful and good.

3
A Middle-aged Failure

EXCEPT FOR JESUS THE DOMINATING FIGURE OF EARLY CHRISTIAN history is a fiery little Jew, who about the year A.D. 44 was an unemployed genius waiting for something to turn up. With that urgent consciousness of power which all men of superlative ability must have he had come to middle age without having achieved anything that either he or his biographer thought worthy of mentioning in later years. Had his opportunity not appeared, he must have soon become that most miserable of beings a disappointed man. This was Saul of Tarsus, afterward known as Paul the apostle.[1]

Saul was born to a prominent Pharisaic family up in the Cilician capital, Tarsus, where Alexander the Great almost drowned while bathing in the river Cydnus, where Julius Caesar marched with his troops when returning from Egypt, and where Mark Antony's first meeting with Cleopatra changed the course of European history. The names of the great—Alexander, Antiochus, Caesar, Pompey, and Mark Antony—were written into the history of Tarsus. Its people would have been astonished had they been told that its chief claim to fame was the fact that this middle-aged Jew, who had turned away from the faith of his fathers to follow the man from Nazareth, was born there.

[1] The name Paul first appears in Acts 13:9, "Saul, who is also called Paul." Why or when the apostle adopted the latter form, we do not know.

That Saul was a little man is probable, though he could not have been the insignificant appearing figure that tradition has often made him. We should not accept too readily the taunt of his enemies that "his bodily presence [was] weak, and his speech of no account." The labors and hardships of his life show him to have been capable of great physical endurance, and we remember that when he visited Lystra, the superstitious mountain people of Lycaonia hailed him as a god. But it seems that his eyesight was defective and his health uncertain. As to his career there can be no doubt that his family regarded him as a disappointment and a failure.

Tarsus was a Roman garrison city, a center of the imperial power. As a boy Saul must have been familiar with the sight of marching soldiers, rugged men who could march all day loaded with heavy equipment and who could sleep on the bare ground wherever they stopped. Clothed in leather and metal, their bare feet thrust into heavy sandals, they were tough men who took hardship and wounds, and even death, as a matter of course. These were the men Paul had in mind when he called on the wavering Timothy to stand up and take it as "a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

Paul was an amalgam of the influence of his Roman environment, his orthodox Jewish home, and his Christian experience. In temperament and mentality he was far different from Jesus. Reading his letters and then turning to the Gospels, one would know that one man came from the city with its crowds, its soldiers, its athletic arenas, and the ships of the world in its harbor, while the other was from an upstate town, where boys took note, not of soldiers and rival athletes, but of birds and wildflowers, the ways of a hen with her chicks, and the labors of farmers and shepherds.

Like the Scottish families whose pride and joy was the educating of a son for the ministry, Saul's family had looked for-

ward to his becoming a rabbi. Tarsus was famous for its schools. Its university rivaled the famous one at Alexandria. The people of the city honored men of learning, and for two generations it approached the Platonic ideal of a community governed by philosophers. We may be sure that the young Saul was well prepared when at the age of thirteen or fourteen he was sent to Jerusalem to take his place "at the feet of Gamaliel," the great Jewish teacher. In this respect the future "apostle to the Gentiles" was like John Wesley, who would have become one of England's great scholars had he not been called to forsake the pursuits of the study for the life of an itinerant evangelist.

According to Jewish custom the youth had been taught a trade. A leading industry of Tarsus was the weaving of cloth from the hair of the great flocks of goats in the near-by Taurian mountains. The tents of the Roman army were made of this material, and young Saul became a tentmaker. Repeatedly in his letters he expressed his belief in the value of a man's knowing how to work with his hands.[2] In his farewell address to the leaders of the church at Ephesus he said, holding up his work-worn hands, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me." This reference to his support of his companions suggests that men like Timothy and Titus, brought up in Greek homes, probably had no ready means of making a living and in a pinch were obliged to depend on Paul's ability as a skilled workman to get a job wherever he happened to be.

Paul's family were, doubtless, people of ample means. His father was a Roman citizen and must have been a man of consequence. Rome did not confer the prestige and privileges of citizenship on undistinguished Jews. The kind of education

[2] See I Cor. 4:12; Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:11; Acts 20:34.

Paul received would hardly be available to a poor man's son. As a follower of Christ, however, he would not have the support of his family. When he said that he was willing to be a castaway and that he had willingly suffered "the loss of all things" if only he might gain Christ, he was not indulging in pious rhetoric. Toward the end of his life there are some indications that, perhaps through the death of relations, he became financially independent.

For many years young Saul sat "at the feet" of the famous teacher Gamaliel in Jerusalem, probably living with his married sister there. It was his sister's son years afterward who saved him from his enemies when he was in peril of death.[3] One wonders what might have been the course of European history if that young man had not been alert and loyal when the plot against his uncle's life was being hatched.

When we first meet Saul in the New Testament, "breathing threats and murder" against the followers of Christ, he has given the first half of his life to training for a career as a teacher of the sacred law. Comparable to him in our time would be a young doctor of philosophy from a famous university, whose abilities have been noticed in influential quarters and who is fairly started on the way to distinction in his profession.

When we read of Saul's conversion, in the book of Acts, we read of the total collapse of a man's career. "It hurts you to kick against the goads," the Lord said. Indeed it did hurt! That "goad" was a man's conscience stabbing him to sacrifice half a lifetime of preparation for a profession. It meant giving up an assured income, social position, the hopes of his family, and his own hopes. When, as he said years afterward in his defense before King Agrippa, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision," he was assuredly "a fool for Christ's

[3] See Acts 23:16.

sake" and "counted everything trash in order to gain Christ."

Every door was closed to him, even the door to the service of the Christ who had laid his hand upon him. He had turned his back on the orthodoxy of his fathers, and he got the cold shoulder from the followers of Jesus. "I have heard from many about this man," one of them said, "how much evil he has done." "When he had come to Jerusalem," writes Luke, "he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple."

Some readers of the New Testament may not realize that there was an interval of years between Paul's conversion and the beginning of his work at Antioch.[4] What he was doing during those years, we do not know. He mentions, rather vaguely, a sojourn in Arabia, and we are told in Acts that he preached in Damascus and barely escaped assassination there. Three years after his conversion he went to Jerusalem and stayed fifteen days with Peter. What the object of this visit was, we are not told; but we suspect that he was looking for some kind of recognition and appointment by the official leaders. In plain language he was an unemployed genius looking for a job, as many a genius has had to do.

So it was that in Tarsus sometime before the year 46 there was a little Jew with his heart aflame waiting for an opportunity. No doubt he worked at his trade. No doubt he preached here and there, but he was not wanted by the leaders of the Christian movement, who were engaged in a difficult and at times dangerous enterprise and dared not take a chance with a man with Paul's record. In Tarsus he must have been regarded as a waster of opportunity. He was the son of a strict Pharisaic family. He had been given every advantage and had been put in the way of attaining high

[4] How long this interval was, we do not know. Different scholars have estimated it at from three to nine years.

preferment as a rabbi, and he had thrown it all away to become the follower of the sect which hailed as the Messiah a Galilean carpenter who had been hanged as a criminal. Paul was more than forty years of age, and by the standards of what men call common sense he was a failure.

Few men, even men of genius, have achieved much without help. Follow the great man up through his career, and somewhere along the way you will see where a hand was held out to him. So it was with Paul. Across the Gulf of Alexandretta in Antioch a man named Joseph, who was called Barnabas or "Exhorter," had undertaken to organize a church among the converts to the new faith. He had been sent there by the leaders in Jerusalem, who had learned that some kind of beginning had been made. It is possible that they were not unwilling to assign him to a distant undertaking, for he seems to have been a man of more liberal mind than they unreservedly approved. Moreover, he was from the island of Cyprus and was therefore something of an outsider among the conservatives of Jerusalem. It is evident that the church leaders thought it advisable to keep an eye on him and his work and that their interference led to friction.

Barnabas found himself in a great, turbulent city. Unlike Tarsus, Antioch had been little affected by the culture of the Greeks. The influence of its Syrian founders persisted; it was notorious as a center of immorality; and its people cared more for the sensual pleasures of life than for religion, learning, or philosophy.

To this place refugee Jews and followers of Christ had fled, finding safety here because the indifference of people to any religion made them tolerant toward all. It was a magnificent opportunity for a Christian mission, but it was certain that in such a place no strait-laced orthodoxy would succeed. If the gospel were not for everybody, without regard

to race or condition, it was not for Antioch. We understand then why Barnabas, when he saw that he must have help, did not seek it in Jerusalem. It would have been easy for him to send word to the church there and to secure a well-approved helper. Instead he "remembered Saul." Although the little Tarsan had been given no cordial welcome by the leaders of the church, and although they had promptly washed their hands of him by shipping him on the way to his home town of Tarsus, Barnabas had believed in him from the beginning. So little had he accomplished, and so little were the church leaders interested in him that his precise whereabouts were unknown. "So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch."

Thus after years of groping for a foothold Saul of Tarsus was set on the path of achievement which led to his great career as Paul the apostle. For some twenty years after joining Barnabas this aging man, suffering from chronic ill-health, his vision so bad that he was obliged to have others write his letters for him, ranged up and down the world, preaching the faith of Christ. Though his letters are full of evidences of the friendships that he formed with his Gentile converts, he must have been in some respects a lonely man. Among the class of people with whom he had been brought up to associate he was an outcast. Profoundly versed in the ancient culture of the Jews and prepared for membership in a privileged intellectual aristocracy, his life was spent for the most part in labor and hardship. Nor was he ever received wholeheartedly among the more conservative people of the new faith, who regarded him as dangerously modernistic. To the end of his life he was persecuted by heresy hunters, who not only opposed his theology but impugned his motives and attacked his character. Through all his career he had to "fight a good fight" against the corruptions of paganism, the

antagonism of the Jews, and the intolerance of Christians whose opinions differed from his own. When the leading men at Jerusalem were forced by the results he achieved to acknowledge him as a true missionary of Christ, they did so with reluctance and reservations. His letters abound in grateful references to the loyalty and affection of his Gentile converts. Without the friendship of these former heathen there would have been few to cheer him in his times of discouragement and depression or to support him in his work. When about the year 66 the news came to Tarsus that he had fallen a victim to the rage of Nero and had been beheaded, we can imagine the talk that went on among the old-timers who had known him in his youth. "Too bad," they would say. "I remember him well—a brilliant young fellow, but queer. He had every chance of making something of himself, but he threw himself away." And they would sigh and say, "Ah well, children are often a disappointment to their parents."

And for some who have not done too well and whose hearts fail as they realize that more than half of life is gone and that old age is not far off it may be cheering to remember that sometime about the year 44 the middle-aged man who became the apostle Paul, and who apart from the one whose name he proclaimed exerted on human history a greater influence than any other among its heroes, was up in Tarsus, with nothing done that he afterward thought worth mentioning, looked at askance by his old schoolmates and the friends of his family, a disappointment and a failure.

4
The Saintly Wranglers

Sometimes the undevout jeer at the frequency with which the followers of the Prince of Peace get into fights with one another. The church that has gone along for a generation without an outbreak of saintly warfare is apt to plume itself on its harmonious record.

Squabbling among the saints began early in the history of the Church. An astonishing proportion of the New Testament is devoted to narratives and exhortations occasioned by contention. At least half of the writings of Paul deal, directly or indirectly, with wrangling, jealousies, disputes about authority, theological differences, or just plain conflicts between discordant personalities. The famous passage on "charity" or "love" in the first letter to the Corinthians was written in the hope of persuading the people of the church to put an end to their unholy rows.

The most solemn hour recorded in the New Testament, apart from the scene in Gethsemane and the story of the Crucifixion, was begun with a wrangle among the apostles. "A dispute also arose among them," wrote Luke, "which of them was to be regarded as the greatest." "Dispute" is too mild a word. The Greek *philoneikia* is used in the Septuagint to describe the bitter quarrel between Simon and Onias, which "went so far, that by one of Simon's faction murders were committed." [1] The contention among the twelve apostles was

[1] Septuagint, II Maccabees 4:3.

of long standing. Months before the meeting in the upper room, when they were coming into Capernaum, Jesus asked them what they had been discussing on the way, but they were silent for they had disputed with one another as to who was the greatest.[2] It was then that he called to him a little child and put him in the midst of them and said, "Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

When on the night before Jesus died the old dispute broke out again, "he girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet." It was no mere gesture of humility. They had walked miles along the dusty roads in open sandals. The laving of a guest's feet by a servant was a customary attention.[3] In the pagan world, said Jesus, great men exercised lordship over their inferiors, but "not so with you: rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves." "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." In the addresses and prayers which follow, according to John, Jesus returns again and again to the need for harmony and unity among them. "That they may all be one," he prayed, ". . . so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." So far as we may judge by such knowledge of history as we possess, that prayer has never been answered. The Christian world is still divided into sects and parties, and the validity of Christ's claims must rest on support other than that supplied by reference to the spirit of unity among his followers.

The background of Paul's first letter to Corinth is a church agitated by strife among its people. After a few opening

[2] See Matt. 18:1; Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46; 22:24.

[3] Sir Walter Scott in his first novel, *Waverley*, mentions this as a courteous attention among the Scottish highlanders.

sentences the apostle abruptly states the reason for his writing. "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . that there be no dissensions among you. . . . For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you." Party rivalries have sprung up, each group following a favorite teacher. "Each one of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?" Thus in the beginning of the Church's history the scandal of sectarian rivalries and contentions appeared.

Men will always differ concerning matters for which they deeply care. When Boswell commented on the amiability with which a religious argument had been conducted, Dr. Johnson answered, "Sir, they disputed with good humor because they were not in earnest as to religion. No, Sir! Every man will dispute with great good humor on a subject in which he is not interested." Paul would have agreed with Dr. Johnson. He himself was not sparing of emphatic argument when his convictions were crossed. But there is "a more excellent way." We remember that our knowledge is only in part. None of us knows it all. Intolerance, rudeness, conceit, insistence on one's own way—these are evidences of an immature mind. "When I became a man, I gave up childish ways." There must be varieties of gifts and ways of working, "but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." One man, he says, eats meat; another makes a religious issue of being a vegetarian. "One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike." Very well. "Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord."

It is an astonishing commentary on the perversity of human nature that the Lord's Supper, intended to be a symbol of the unity of the faith, has been the occasion of endless bitter and futile conflict. The inhuman intolerance among men who professed to follow Christ may be seen in the decree of the Council of Trent, in 1563, to the effect that anyone who shall deny the wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the wine into his blood—then "let him be anathema," which in the sixteenth century meant cursed, excommunicated, and sometimes burned at the stake. On the other hand John Calvin, who died a year later, said, "With these and other similar inventions, Satan has endeavored to obscure, corrupt, and adulterate the sacred supper of Christ." The papal mass, he said, is not only a sacrilegious profanation of the Lord's Supper, but is a total annihilation of it.[4]

Christ's disciples quarreled at the first institution of the Supper, and they have been quarreling about it ever since. The passage in which Paul gives his account of the institution of the sacrament was written because of trouble in regard to it in the Corinthian church. Not only were there factions among the people, but he says, "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk." It is by their factious and irreverent conduct that they "eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner." It was in writing to these people, pleading for reverence and harmony in observing this memorial of Christ, that he was led to the composition of the inspired poem on the supremacy of brotherly love which forms the thirteenth chapter of the first Corinthian letter. In the earlier chapters

[4] *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* IV, xviii.

he has outlined the disruptive situation in the church and has discussed the contentions that have divided the people. Then he says, "I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." [5] It is a pity that Stephen Langton, who divided the New Testament into chapters in the thirteenth century, saw fit to cut this beautiful meditation on charity, or love, from the preceding context. Reading it always with reference to the practical situation which occasioned it, we shall avoid the sugary sentimentality with which it is usually interpreted.

No man loved to argue more than Paul. No man was ever a sturdier defender of what he believed to be the truth, but he saw that the answers to the problems arising from the fact that "our knowledge is imperfect," and that "now we see in a mirror dimly," could never be resolved by intolerance and self-conceit. A great change had taken place in this man since the days when he went about "breathing threats and murder" and "binding and delivering to prison both men and women" for holding a belief different from his own.

The issue between fundamentalism and modernism was hotly debated in the New Testament church. One party held to what it regarded as the unchangeable law of Moses, interpreted according to the traditions of the scribes who followed Ezra. The other was influenced by the prevailing current of Greek thought. Within each group there were intolerant minorities, as there have been in our own time. The modernist's assumption of superior intelligence and the fundamentalist's dogmatism are equally destructive of the mutual respect which

[5] The Greek word *agape* is rendered "charity" in the old version of the New Testament and "love" in the modern translations. There is no precise equivalent for the New Testament word in English, but it seems to me that "charity" is to be preferred.

makes it possible for men of opposing views to discuss their differences and help each other in arriving at the truth.

Paul's letters are full of protests against the kind of traditionalism that would substitute a theological or ecclesiastical system for the free grace of Christ. He fought with all the gallantry of his warrior's heart against the idea that one must enter the Church through the door of the temple and be circumcised as a Jew before he could be baptized as a Christian. At the same time he warned those who were inclined to be infatuated by a smattering of philosophy and science not to cut themselves off from the ancient revelation in which the faith of Christ was rooted. As the epistle to the church in Rome was read, one can imagine the Gentile converts nudging each other and nodding their heads as the apostle exposed some of the futilities of the rabbinical system. Suddenly he turned upon them. "Now," he said, "I am speaking to you Gentiles. . . . If some of the branches were broken off, and you . . . were grafted in the place . . . , do not boast. . . . Remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. . . . So do not become proud, but stand in awe. . . . Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery." The apostle might have been speaking to some of our contemporaries who have ceased to be nourished in the ancient faith and have found no rest unto their souls in the pallid mixture of sentiment and psychology which has displaced it. Reduced to their essential meanings, the controversies in the New Testament church differed little from those which have disturbed the peace of the churches of our own time.

The troubles of the saints were not always wrangles among factions in which anyone was welcome to take a hand. Sometimes they were private fights. Such was the battle of Philippi —not the historic one between two Roman armies, but the

feud between two godly women of the Philippian church. It was at Philippi, in 42 B.C., that the Roman republic was crushed by the armies of Octavius and Antony. It was there by the side of the river that Paul won his first convert to Christianity in Europe, the businesswoman Lydia. And it was there that a church grew up that he loved as he loved no other. By the Roman authorities of the town he had been illegally beaten and imprisoned, but among the people he made some of the most affectionate friendships of his life. To the church there he wrote the tenderest of all his letters, calling its people "my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown." "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you," he wrote, ". . . I hold you all in my heart as partakers with me of grace. . . . I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

It was among these people, the tokens of whose love followed the apostle wherever he went, that two women, both of whom he remembered gratefully as his fellow workers, got into one of those temperamental tangles which sometimes end in a snarl that wrecks friendships and disrupts a church. What it was all about, we do not know. We have only the few words near the close of the letter, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they have labored side by side with me in the gospel." The urgency of his appeal is indicated by his repetition of the word "entreat." Who the "true yokefellow" was, we are not told. Some have thought it might be the businesswoman Lydia, others that the word rendered "yokefellow" is a proper name *Syzygus*. Anyone with experience in institutions to which able and consecrated women give their services will recognize the situation. Euodia and Syntyche, good women as they are, can still raise a dust in a church that will call for the wisdom of Solomon plus the patience of Job to allay.

The Church of Christ is made up of all sorts and conditions of people, and where there are all kinds of people, there can never be uniformity of belief or of practice except in the broadest sense. The marvel is that the cohesive power of Christianity was sufficient to bind together in an enduring institution the orthodox Jew, the worldly Roman, the cultivated Greek, and the barbarian mountain people of the Mediterranean hinterland. It is vain to hope for uniformity in the Church, and folly to desire it. By all means let honest men honorably disagree. But one may be firmly convinced and may stand firmly for his convictions without assuming that to him more than to other men the promise of Jesus has been fulfilled that "the Holy Spirit will teach you" all things. Richard Steele, the famous English essayist, once remarked that the only difference he could see between the Catholic and the Anglican churches was that "the Church of Rome is infallible while the Church of England is never wrong." One recalls the exclamation of Oliver Cromwell when a delegation of cocksure Puritan preachers urged upon him what they believed was the will of God. "I beseech ye," he said, "by the mercies of Christ, to imagine whether ye may be mistaken."

We may be sure that Jesus never expected that his followers would all think alike, nor that there would not be differences among people of different background, race, and language. Some of those early Christians were accustomed to the dry legalism that since the time of Ezra had drained the faith of Israel of vitality, some to the lush imagery of the Orient, some to the mystic speculations of the Greek philosophers, and some to the cool analysis of science. That they should disagree was inevitable.

It is said that if there were no differences of opinion, there would be no horse races. The saying applies in concerns far more important than sport. Patriotism is kept warm and liv-

ing by the friction engendered in political rivalry and discussion. So, when people cease to differ about religion, they will cease to be religious. Nothing can be a greater bore than a dead level of agreement.

When Dr. James McCosh was president of Princeton, he used to preach on occasion for a neighboring pastor. Once a lady and gentleman came up to him after the service to greet him. "You probably don't remember us, Dr. McCosh," said the lady, "but you married us twenty-five years ago. And in all that time," she added, "we have never had a single disagreement."

"Ah," said the old philosopher, with a Scottish twinkle in his eye, "I'm sure that is verra commendable, but I'm afraid it must have been awfu' dull." Whatever we may think of the Christianity of today, there was plenty of disagreement in that of the first century, and it was certainly never dull.

5

The Embarrassed Messiah

We know that Jesus wept, that he was astonished, angry, weary, and sad. But was he ever ashamed? With all his courage and his adroitness in dealing with his enemies was he ever at a loss, defenseless? We may find the answer suggested in the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel of John.

According to John, Jesus was first taken after his arrest to the house of old Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest. Annas had been high priest twenty years before. He was a shrewd, unscrupulous politician, who still played the game and moved the pawns of politics among the Jews. Among the pawns he moved was his son-in-law, the present occupant of the high-priestly office.

When Jesus drove the money-changers out of the courts of the temple, he was interfering with the business concerns of the family of Annas. Their avarice was notorious. The "den of thieves" denunciation of Jesus struck at the source of their wealth. The writers of the Talmud repeatedly refer to their corruption. As Sadducees these men would not have been much concerned with the religious teaching of Jesus. They would have shrugged their shoulders at many of the questions about which the Pharisees were fanatically controversial. But when Jesus ventured to touch upon their "graft" and call public attention to the scandal of their administration of the temple offices, they not only joined with the Pharisees to destroy him, but took the matter entirely into their own hands.

From this time on to the end of the drama the Pharisees take a subordinate place in the story.

So Jesus stood before the old political boss. Outside in the courtyard Peter was standing with the soldiers, warming himself by the fire.[1] "The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching." Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. . . . Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard me." About his disciples he has not a word to say. He could defend his life and his teaching. He could expose the folly and corruption of his enemies. But when the crafty old priest pointed the finger at his friends, he was silent. If ever he had reason to be ashamed, it was then when one of his followers had betrayed him, another was denying him, and the rest, as Mark tells the story, "all forsook him, and fled."

Here is the record. It was the night before Jesus' arrest. He had gathered the twelve in the upper room for the last supper together. In that solemn hour, when the forces that were to destroy him were closing in, these men engaged in an unseemly dispute as to "which of them was to be regarded as the greatest." If Jesus had appointed Peter as their leader, they were not aware of it.

And Judas "immediately went out; and it was night." We know what he went to do. We may be sure that old Annas knew about it too and had most likely furnished the thirty pieces of silver for which Judas sold out his friend.

Then, when he spoke of leaving them, Peter said, "Lord, why cannot I follow you now?" "Though they all fall away

[1] According to the Gospel of John, Jesus was taken to the old ex-high priest before being taken to Caiaphas. If the writer was the "other disciple" who was present, we may assume that his account of the incident, where it differs from the others, is to be preferred.

because of you, I will never fall away. . . . Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you."

We know how that promise turned out when Peter there in the courtyard of the high priest warmed himself by the fire and denied that he had ever known this Galilean.

When they had finished their meeting in the upper room, they went out, over the brook Kidron, to the garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus would prepare himself to die. And he took with him Peter and James and John and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." There was need for watchfulness that night, but they failed him and went to sleep.

He said, "Could you not watch with me one hour? . . . Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." Then Judas came to him and called him "Master" and kissed him.

"Then all the disciples forsook him and fled."

Now as old Annas looked out into the courtyard, there was one of these same disciples, known to future generations as Peter the Rock, warming himself by the fire built by the men who were soon to drive the nails through the hands and feet of the friend he had denied.

Jesus made excuses for them. The spirit is willing, he said, but the flesh is weak. He knew that neither they, nor any other human agency, could help him now. He had chosen his way, and he must follow it to the end. But as he stood there and wily old Annas asked the question, "What about your disciples?" Jesus was, for once, defenseless. There was nothing to say.

During all the centuries since that day, since Judas sold him out and Peter, cosily warming himself at the enemy's fire, denied that he had any part or lot with him, Jesus has been on trial. Over and over again those who would have been glad to condemn him have, like Pilate, found no fault in him. Those

who have rejected the creeds of his followers have yet regarded him as unique among men. Jews have thought him the greatest among the prophets. Hindus have hailed him as supreme. To Jesus himself believers and unbelievers have paid tribute. Through all the centuries he has been subjected to every test inquiring men could devise, his every word and deed examined; yet wherever the critic has thrust his probe, the result has been to justify the challenge, "Which of you convicts me of sin?" He stands supreme in history, guiltless and unimpeached.

But at one point he was vulnerable. "What of your disciples?" He had no defense when the finger was pointed, not at him, but at his friends.

Old Annas knew full well that he was driving an innocent man to the death of a criminal. We may be sure that nothing of significance had happened among that little band of the Galilean's followers of which he had not been informed. He could not apart from perjury convict Jesus of any wrong, but he could sneer at his disciples, and at his disciples he has been sneering ever since.

Those first disciples were not cowards nor hypocrites beyond the common run of men. Peter really believed that he would die with his friend before he would deny him. He failed because he did not realize that Jesus spoke simple, unavoidable truth when he warned his followers that his way led, not to glory, but the cross. When Jesus spoke of the death that he saw was inevitable, "God forbid!" said Peter. "This shall never happen to you." He loved sincerely; his discipleship was wholehearted, but he, like multitudes of others who have undertaken the way of Christ, could not yet be persuaded that "whoever would save his life will lose it." And, like multitudes of others, he thought he could be faithful to his

master while warming himself at the fire of his master's enemies. That has been the error of the Church all through its history.

Whatever Jesus may have meant by the "rock" on which he purposed to build his Church, we know that he suffered no illusions concerning his followers. He did not demand nor expect from them more than is within the capacity of ordinary men and women. But there seem to have been times when he was disheartened and ashamed as the men with whom he had labored through so many months showed so little understanding of his mission and his teaching and betrayed so much of the frailty of human nature. "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of," he said. "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me?" "[You love] the praise of men more than the praise of God." "Could you not watch with me one hour?" And when Judas had cried, "Hail, Master," and kissed him, and the crowd pressed in to see him arrested, "behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest." How often has it happened in the history of the Church when by disobedience, denial, and betrayal the followers of Christ have brought him again to Gethsemane, they have compounded their folly by a vain resort to force. We seem to hear his sigh of wondering disheartenment as he says, "Put your sword back into its place." [2]

According to Canon F. R. Barry,

> The one really formidable argument against the truth of the Christian religion is the record of the Christian Church. Again and again it has denied its Lord, distorted His teaching and betrayed His spirit. Again and again it has taken the wrong side. The Church as an organized institution has too often appeared

[2] For a discussion concerning this "sword" see Chap. 6.

not merely irrelevant, but positively injurious and obstructive to the cause of Christ.[3]

And Gibbon wrote:

> The theologian may indulge in the pleasing task of describing religion as she descended from heaven, arrayed in her native purity. A more melancholy duty is imposed on the historian. He must discover the inevitable mixture of error and corruption which she contracted in a long residence upon earth among a weak and degenerate race of beings.[4]

Boccaccio told a true parable of the Church's history in his tale of the unbeliever who was persuaded to visit Rome, the headquarters of holiness, where he would come under the influence of the successors of the apostle to whom had been committed the keys of heaven. He returned to Paris a convert to Christianity, saying that any institution that could survive the corruption he had witnessed must be divine.

All this Jesus anticipated as he prepared his followers for their task. He could not claim that they were faithful. He could not defend them, but he could forgive them. And on them, frail and faulty as they were, he built the Church, and "the gates of hell" have not prevailed against it.

[3] Quoted by S. Angus, *Essential Christianity* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1939).

[4] *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Chap. XV.

6

The Man Who Meant Well

When you hear a person say, "of course he always means well," you may be sure that the next word will be "but," followed by a recital of faults and follies. No doubt the men who followed Jesus discussed Peter in just this way. Among them all Peter is the best example of the human proclivity to noble intention and blundering deed.

Boswell in his famous biography of Dr. Samuel Johnson refers several times to his hero's self-condemning for good intentions that went wrong. "No saint," he wrote, "was ever more sensible of the unhappy failure of his pious resolves than Johnson. He said one day, talking to an acquaintance, 'Sir, hell is paved with good intentions.' "

Robert Browning took a different view. He said:

> Better have failed in the high aim, as I,
> Than vulgarly in the low aim succeed.

> 'Tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man
> Would do.

Ever judge of men by their professions! For though the bright moment of promising is but a moment and cannot be prolonged, yet, if sincere in its moment's extravagant goodness, why, trust it and know the man by it, I say—not by his performance.

Browning's view was that of Paul, who insisted that a man is justified, not by his deed, but by the faith in which his

deed is done. "As there [is] a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have," wrote Paul. "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

Wherever Peter appears in the narrative, he draws upon himself discredit and rebuke. He makes a ludicrous figure in the episode of the walking on the water. In the scene on which the tradition of his pre-eminence among the saints is based the words, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church," have hardly been spoken before he is subjected to as severe a rebuke as Jesus ever administered to the hypocritical Pharisees, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men." Repeatedly throughout the Gospels and in the Acts, Peter fails. He is tactless, boastful, pusillanimous. Jesus again and again rebukes him, understands him, and forgives him.

Peter had a bad time with himself during the last twenty-four hours before his Master went to the cross. When the disciples were in the upper room and Jesus began to wash their feet, as a servant might have done for guests who had walked the dusty roads, it was Peter who protested and had to be corrected. When Jesus talked of men turning against him, it was Peter who spoke up and said that he would go to prison or die before he would deny his friend. And it was Peter who a few hours later denied with oaths that he had ever known this carpenter from Galilee.

In the tragic hour in Gethsemane, where Jesus went to prepare himself for the coming agony, Peter was one of the three who undertook to watch while Jesus prayed, and promptly fell asleep. Jesus was gentle with them, perhaps recalling times when he himself had been overcome by physical exhaustion. Later Peter again blundered in making an assault on

one of the party that came to arrest Jesus. In our English versions John says that Peter rashly drew a "sword" in defense of Jesus. That Peter and at least one other disciple went from the upper room with swords dangling from their sides is absurdly improbable. Likely enough they carried fishermen's sheath knives which may have been used at the table for cutting meat. The Greek word *machaira* denoted a short, sharp weapon—sword, dagger, or knife. In the Greek version of the Old Testament it is used to describe the knife used for circumcision, the knife Abraham took to slay his son, and the knives used by the prophets of Baal to inflict wounds upon themselves.[1] In any case, Peter's intentions were of the best, but he succeeded only in wounding somebody's slave and bringing upon himself another rebuke.

Peter never stopped to measure himself against a situation that called for action. He sought no reason for delay when faced with the need of making a commitment. On the occasion when he rashly jumped overboard from the boat and "beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me,' " he looked like anything but a hero; nevertheless he was the one among them who did not stop to ask how deep the water was before his love for Jesus impelled him to make the plunge. There was a generous, self-forgetting impulsiveness about Peter that must have endeared him to those who knew him.

Probably the lowest point in Peter's life was at that hour when he "went out and wept bitterly" after having sworn that he had never known the friend whom he had hailed as master and "the Son of the living God." Yet it may well be that he never knew a nobler moment than that in which his love moved him to cry out, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." He failed miserably, yet

[1] Septuagint, Josh. 5:2-3; Gen. 22:6, 10; I Kings 13:28. There are other words for the broadsword and the saber.

when the morning came and his face was wet with the tears of brokenhearted repentance, he could still look into the face of the man he had denied and say, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." It is on the lives of men and women who despite their own failures and the failures of others cling to their loyalties and their hopes, that the kingdom of heaven is built.

He who follows Christ must risk something on the grace of God. The folly of the man who rashly plunged into a building operation without taking thought as to whether he had enough money to finish it is the theme of one of those parables which display the humorous insight of Jesus; nevertheless we must not be too intent on counting the loaves and fishes before we undertake to feed the hungry. The follower of Christ must be willing to try, however conscious he is of his own imperfections and the adversity of circumstance. We remember that at the close of that day when he died on the cross even the friends of Jesus thought that he had ignominiously failed. "We had hoped," they said; but their hope was dead. It is the glory of the faith of Christ that it triumphs over the victories of its enemies and over the failures of its friends.

If those early Christians had carefully measured their abilities, their virtues, and their resources against the tasks they undertook, the Christian Church would never have freed itself from the bonds of conventional Judaism, Barnabas would never have left the comfortable orthodoxy of Jerusalem for the uncertainties of a heathen city, nor, having done so, would he ever have chosen for his partner a man with the record of Saul of Tarsus. The progress of mankind has come by the gallantry of men and women who have attempted the seemingly impossible, who have pledged themselves to saintly life well knowing that they were all but irresistibly inclined to sin, who

have allied themselves with forlorn hopes and assumed obligations beyond any discernible power to discharge.

The Christian Church has honored Peter above all others except the mother Mary, yet he was the one among the early disciples who most often had to be forgiven for good intentions that went wrong. Perhaps, like the woman "who was a sinner," and who anointed the feet of Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee, he was forgiven much because he loved much. With all his boastings and his blunderings we wonder if Peter after all may not have been nearer to the heart of Jesus than the one who refers to himself, according to tradition, as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." [2]

[2] Four times in the Gospel of John "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is mentioned. Some have thought he was a young follower of Jesus, a resident in Jerusalem, not a member of the apostolic twelve.

7

The Courage of the Coward

THERE IS NO COURAGE GREATER THAN THAT OF THE MAN WHO has been afraid, no hero more heroic than the one who has played the coward. "Make a coward fight," says an old proverb, "and he will kill the devil."

Here, for instance, is Peter, the fisherman. He had been accustomed to the water from childhood. According to the story in the Gospel of John he must have been a good swimmer. When the disciples, having fished through the night, saw Jesus on the shore, Peter sprang into the sea and swam the hundred yards to meet him. "The other disciples," says John, "came in the boat." Yet Matthew tells us that when Peter found himself overboard on another occasion, "when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me.' "

It is clear from the record that Peter was wanting in nerve. He was the man who boasted that he would go to prison or die before he would deny Jesus, and then within a few hours, when a girl accused him of being a friend of Jesus, he "began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, 'I do not know the man.' " Nearly twenty years later Paul had occasion to blame Peter for his pusillanimous truckling to the men who came from the church at Jerusalem to see if the work at Antioch were being conducted according to what they considered orthodox views. "When Cephas[1] came to Antioch," wrote Paul, "I op-

[1] "Cephas" is an Aramaic form of the name "Peter."

posed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party."

In the Gospel of John we read of another man whose courage was not equal to his conviction. This was Nicodemus, "a man of the Pharisees, . . . a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night."

Why by night? Because he was afraid to come by daylight. He was a man of consequence, with a reputation to preserve and a position to maintain. He dared not have it known that he had sought out the young prophet from Galilee. It may be that Jesus at the time was out in the Mount of Olives, where he loved to go, and that the famous saying, "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it," was suggested by the evening breeze rustling in the leaves of the trees.

With all his learning and his high position Nicodemus was not at peace. He was drawn to Jesus by the same power and the same need that drew the common people. So he must see Jesus, but it must be furtively, in the dark. In reading the account we cannot tell where the writer ceases to quote the words of Jesus and begins to add his own comment, but the closing paragraph probes deeply into the motives of men like Nicodemus. "Every one who does evil hates the light. . . . But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God." If those were the words Nicodemus heard as he took leave of Jesus, he must have gone away humiliated and ashamed.

We meet this ruler of the Jews again further along in the story when he plucked up courage for the moment. The priestly authorities had sent their officers to arrest Jesus. These men had been so impressed when they heard Jesus speak that they dared not molest him and came back saying that "no man

ever spoke like this man." It was when their superiors were discussing what to do next that Nicodemus spoke up. "Does our law," he asked, "judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" [2] It took courage to say that much, but Nicodemus was not quite out in the daylight yet. When they sneered at him, "Are you from Galilee too?" he was silent.

Two of Paul's young helpers came short in this virtue of courage, which was regarded by the Greek moralists as forming with justice, wisdom, and temperance the great quartet of human qualities. One youth whose courage failed was John Mark, who later wrote the Gospel that bears his name. He joined Paul and Barnabas in their first evangelistic tour but turned back at the city of Perga. The going was rough for a missionary in those days, and it called for more stamina than this son of a wealthy Jewish convert possessed. His defection, as we shall see later, was the cause of the bitter quarrel which caused Paul and Barnabas to separate. The other faltering saint was Timothy, who was approaching middle age when Paul wrote to him, but who seems to have been somewhat unstable in temperament from the beginning of his career. Paul had to call on him to "be a good soldier," to endure hardships, and to remember that timidity is no gift of God.

The point of this is that these men overcame their faintheartedness and bore valiant testimony to their faith. Peter suffered many a humiliation by his tendency to cowardice. Yet he was capable of adventurous, even reckless action. When he was brought before the old high priest Annas, who had engineered the conspiracy by which Jesus was brought to the Cross, he did not flinch. Facing the meeting of the rulers, eld-

[2] The Revised Standard Version renders the Greek word *krino* "judge" here and "condemn" in John 3:17. Context favors "condemn" in both places.

ers, and scribes, "with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family," he boldly challenged their right to interfere with the preaching of the gospel. And when they threatened him and his companion John and warned them not to speak in the name of Jesus, the apostles answered, "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." And, says Luke, "When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, . . . they recognized that they had been with Jesus." According to the consensus of tradition, after some thirty years of labor as a missionary, fulfilling the command of Jesus, "Feed my sheep," Peter went to the cross as his master had done and died a hero of the faith.

As for Nicodemus, when his fellow "rulers of the Jews" by false accusation, perjury, and betrayal had brought about the tragedy of Calvary, when the man from Galilee was dead, and it looked like final, irretrievable disaster to his cause, and when the professed disciples of Jesus had fled, Nicodemus came out into the light. It was he and another secret disciple who went to the Roman authorities and asked that the body of the young prophet, crucified as a criminal, be turned over to them for honorable burial. We know better now, but even to those who had followed Jesus in his ministry and had been inspired by close association with him it seemed as if his enemies had succeeded in driving him to complete disgrace and oblivion. It is a brave thing to ally yourself with failure.

"He who does what is true, comes to the light," Jesus had said. So Nicodemus came out of the dark. When we consider the position he held, the class to which he belonged, and the vengeful passion the teaching of Jesus had aroused among his associates, it may appear that no man in the Gospel narrative showed greater moral courage than this aristocratic Pharisee when with a wealthy friend he made himself responsible for

the care of the mutilated body of the carpenter of Nazareth.

Timothy and John Mark were young and inexperienced when they were first faced with the hardships and dangers of the apostolic life. Like many another who has found it hard, as Shakespeare said, to "screw [his] courage to the sticking place" they overcame their fears and in the end fought a good fight. An officer commanding a group of men in the most dangerous kind of war service was quoted as saying that he wanted no man in his command who was not afraid at the beginning. It was the man who had overcome his fear who could be depended on.

That fine old campaigner the apostle Paul himself knew times when his heart quailed within him. It was from his own experience that he could assure Timothy that "God did not give us a spirit of timidity." He came to Corinth, he says, "in weakness and in much fear and trembling." He had come from Athens, where a group of the "intelligentsia" had invited him to speak and then jeered at him. It was a disheartened man who laboriously argued with the Jews in the Corinthian synagogue and who finally resolved to get out of town and "go to the Gentiles." It was when Silas and Timothy arrived, when the influential Jew Crispus was converted, and above all when the word came to him, "Do not be afraid, but speak, . . . and no man shall attack you to harm you," that he plucked up his courage and resolved to stay. "And," says Luke, "he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."

Paul's next long stay was in Ephesus, where his work ended in a riot, and he hurriedly left for Macedonia. Again he was depressed and fearful. Years afterward, writing to his Corinthian friends, he said, "When we came into Macedonia, . . . we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within." And again his courage was restored by the opportune

coming of a friend. "God," he wrote, "who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus." [3]

No doubt all the heroes of history have known hours when, like the highland chief in Scott's *Fair Maid of Perth*, they have looked deep into their own hearts and have seen the coward there. Moses was afraid; Jeremiah wanted to "flee to some vast wilderness"; the great warrior Joshua had to be exhorted to keep up his courage; and Elijah after defying king Ahab and withstanding the prophets of Baal "arose and ran for his life" from an angry woman.

In the long farewell discourses reported in the Gospel of John the thought of Jesus reverts again and again to the perils, persecutions, and imprisonments faced by his disciples. The theme of these addresses is, "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." When he promises to send the *paraklete*, or "comforter," he is not thinking of men's need for consolation, but of their need for courage. "We are afraid of truth," said Emerson, "afraid of fortune, afraid of death, and afraid of each other." The first conquest of man is his victory over his own instinctive cowardice.

[3] The New Testament words translated "comfort" and "comforter" have no equivalents in English. The Revised Standard Version renders *parakletos* "counselor," a bad and misleading substitute. The *paraklete* is a strong, sympathetic, helpful friend in time of need.

8

The Backsliding Missionary

PERHAPS BACKSLIDING IS TOO STRONG A WORD, BUT IT IS PLAIN that the apostle Paul was worried. Timothy, his "true child of the faith," was not doing too well. That he was giving his spiritual father anxiety is evident from the two letters that Paul addressed to him.

Because of certain differences in style and viewpoint from other letters ascribed to Paul his authorship of these two has been doubted. It is alleged that the church organization they reflect, with bishops, elders, and other church officers, did not come into being until after the death of the apostle. Some have thought that Luke may have had a hand in their composition; others have suggested that brief instructions from Paul may have been elaborated and given their present form by a later writer. Critical opinion, however, is by no means unanimous, and critics are never infallible. That there is a strong Pauline flavor in the letters is admitted, and for all practical purposes we may take it that they were written by the old campaigner to his younger colleague who was in need of some fatherly advice.

It was at Lystra in the course of the second missionary journey that Paul found this young and ardent Christian, the son of a believing Jewish mother and a Greek father. "He was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra," says Luke, "and . . . Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him." Though Paul was usually strongly opposed to the circumcision of Gentile con-

verts, he yielded in this case to expediency and arranged for Timothy to be circumcised in order that he might have better standing among the Jews.[1]

Timothy was a choice young man, but like many another promising youth he seems not to have fulfilled expectations. It was not long after he joined Paul's party that trouble arose in the church at Corinth, and he was sent there to straighten things out. "I sent to you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ," wrote Paul. ". . . When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you. . . . Let no one despise him. Speed him on his way." Evidently the "spirit of timidity" against which Paul was to warn his young friend years later had already caused the apostle some misgiving. Timothy failed at Corinth. The situation was too much for him, and a steadier man Titus was sent to take his place.

It was some years after this that Timothy was left at Ephesus while Paul went on into Macedonia. The first letter to Timothy appears to have been written at this time. It is full of practical instruction concerning the organization and management of church affairs, along with some personal counsel which indicates some uneasiness on the part of the writer. In the second letter, dated a couple of years later, we find the apostle writing from his imprisonment. In his second letter to the church at Corinth he had referred to "the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches." One of his chief anxieties now arises from reports that have come to him about his "beloved son in the faith."

A Christian leader, says Paul, must be "above reproach, . . .

[1] Acts 16:3. It seems that Paul himself circumcised Timothy. It was permissible for any Israelite to perform the rite, as in the Roman Catholic Church, by the declaration of the Lateran Council of 1216, baptism is valid by whomsoever administered in an emergency.

no drunkard, . . . not quarrelsome, and no lover of money." "This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, . . . that . . . you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith." In the second letter he is feeling lonely and downhearted, convinced that death is not far off. He sees bad times coming when greed, pride, and arrogance will fill the world with strife, and men will be "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it." "I am already on the point of being sacrificed," he says: "the time of my departure has come." Though more than fifteen years have passed since Timothy joined him at Lystra, he still thinks of him as a youth, and he is worried.

Sometimes as experience dissipates dreams, and realities thin down enthusiasms, men suffer what we call disillusionment. The vision, which was the reason for their faith, fades, and losing the shadow they do not know that the substance is within their grasp. So life cools off, and men who promised much lose heart and surrender to the expediencies and cynicism of the world. Through some such experience Timothy may have been passing. He was at the age when the ardor of youth is passing, and men often begin to show prematurely the sag of middle age.

Paul bids him remember the high faith in which he began his work. "I am reminded of your sincere faith," he says, "a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you. Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you." "Rekindle" has not the vigor of the Greek word. The flame of Timothy's faith was burning low, and the apostle wanted the fire stirred up. That Timothy was wanting in courage is suggested in Paul's word to the Corinthian people, "See that

you put him at ease among you." Now Paul urges him to "fight the good fight of faith." The Christian pulpit is no place for a fainthearted man. "God," he says, "did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control. Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord. . . . Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." Three times in the second letter he refers to the need for willingness to endure hardship.

It may be that Timothy was inclined to murmur that the saints were not overgenerous in financial matters. Paul had warned him against those "imagining that godliness is a means of gain." "If we have food and clothing," he says, with these "we shall be content. . . . For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith. . . . As for you, man of God, shun all this."

Timothy was half Greek by birth and more than that in training and environment. Against three Greek traits Paul warns him. One was the love of athletic sports. Paul, as we have seen, always showed a wholesome interest in tests of bodily skill and endurance, but he would have sympathized with Herbert Spencer's comment when an English officer ran out a string at billiards without giving Spencer a shot. "A reasonable aptitude at such pastimes," he said, "may be evidence of a well-balanced mind, but such skill as you have now displayed, Sir, argues an ill-spent youth." With which he stalked indignantly away. Bodily training, says Paul, is of some value, but Timothy has other business. The Christian minister, he says, must be as competent at his job as a first-rate workman is competent at his trade. As a skilled tentmaker he had the trained artisan's respect for good workmanship. He reminds Timothy that he was set apart for a task which demands a high degree of self-discipline. "Do not neglect the gift you

have," he says. "Attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, to teaching. Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress." "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed."

The second Greek trait against which Paul warned Timothy was the decadent intellectualism of the time. Philosophy, once the glory of Greece, had become, as Macaulay said, "a treadmill . . . made up of revolving questions, of controversies always beginning again." The Jew's love of contention about the "mint, anise, and cummin" of the law was matched by the Greek's passion for speculative disputation. In his letter to the church at Colosse, written at about the same time that tradition ascribes to the second letter to Timothy, the apostle wrote, 'See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit," and he goes on to warn the people against theological and ritualistic extravagances. The church there was largely made up of Greek converts, people who would be peculiarly susceptible to such heresies as angel worship and gnosticism.[2] We remember Luke's remark that the intelligentsia of Athens "spent all their time telling or hearing something new."

So Paul lectures his young friend about engaging in "'godless chatter" and "disputing about words." "Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies," he says; "you know that they breed quarrels." In this twentieth century they are still breeding quarrels, and men still argue with bitter insistence, as Paul says, "without understanding . . . the things about which they make assertions."

Paul's third warning to Timothy against following Greek

[2] Gnosticism was a mixture of intellectualism and superstition, which persisted in the Church until the fourth century and of which there are still traces in the classic creeds.

fads was that he have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. The recent revision probably rejected the more accurate rendering of the old version "old wives' fables" to save the reader from supposing that the writer had mere old woman's gossip in mind. All that was left of the religion which had in earlier times exalted the home and instilled a noble patriotism among the Greeks was a vague and discredited mythology on which were based the elaborate rituals of the "mysteries." People then, as they do now, turned to more elaborate forms of religion as they ceased to have faith in its substance. Paul warns Timothy against those "holding the form of religion but denying the power of it." Not much is known of the mystery religions of decadent Greece, but that they had a dangerous influence on the early Church is clear from the later writings in the New Testament. Nor did the Church in still later times quite free itself from these influences. It is the unfortunate truth that some of the things that have made for the disunion of the Christian Church were derived, not from the teaching of Christ, but from the theology and practice of an exhausted paganism. "I am afraid," wrote Paul to the people at Corinth, "your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." His fears were justified in the later history of the Church.

The writer of these two letters to Timothy was worried about the younger man, whom he loved as a son. He saw, even as we in our own time see, times of tragic peril ahead. No easy-going religion will be good enough to save a world bent on going to the devil. No sanctified amateur in the pulpit will be good enough to guide men in a time of social chaos. Such times are not times for dilettantes, dabblers in cults, and quibblers about creeds. Imprisoned and, as he says, "ready to be sacrificed," he sees the end of his career drawing near. Already there have been defections among the men he trusted.

"Demas, in love with this present world," he wrote, "has deserted me." Alexander and Hymenaeus "have made shipwreck of their faith." Another Alexander, whom he identifies as "the coppersmith," has done him great wrong. Phygelus and Hermogenes have "turned away" from him. "At my first defense," he says, "no one took my part; all deserted me." With all his troubles he gratefully remembers loyal friends. Onesiphorus, of Ephesus, he says, "often refreshed me; he was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me eagerly and found me." And Luke, the beloved physician, is still with him.

As we read the second letter to Timothy, we become convinced that it is no mere literary performance. Whatever may be the doubts of scholars concerning date and authorship, this is a genuine appeal from an older man to a younger one of whom he has had disturbing reports. "Do not be ashamed then of testifying," he says. ". . . Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you. . . . Follow the pattern of the sound words. . . . Be strong in the grace. . . . Think over what I say. . . . I charge you in the presence of God, be steady, . . . fulfill your ministry." In the first letter he had said, "I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach."

The affection of this man for his young friend is evident. He is disheartened and lonely, and though Luke is with him, his heart yearns for his "son in the faith." Twice in the second letter he urges Timothy to come to him. "Do your best to come to me soon," he says, and a few sentences further on he adds, "before winter. . . . When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments." Timothy came, doubtless bringing the cloak to warm the old man in his chilly prison house, and the books and parchments to divert his mind. What books and parchments they were, we should give much to know. We

may be sure his heart was warmed and his mind relieved when Timothy came.

We have only tradition for Timothy's later life, although one possible glimpse of him appears at the end of the Epistle to the Hebrews. "You should understand," says the writer, "that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon." Eusebius, one of the most learned among the early Christian scholars, tells us that Timothy became the first bishop of Ephesus, and after more than thirty years of service in the Church witnessed his faith in a martyr's death, in the time of the Emperor Nerva. Thus, as Paul had urged him in the days of his discouragement and wavering, "he fought the good fight" and fulfilled his ministry.

9
Piety and Poverty

We have heard the apostles referred to as "twelve poor fishermen." Only four of them were fishermen so far as we know, nor do we know that they were poor unless we define poverty as it was defined by the English Poor Law Commission, in 1834: "The state of one who, in order to obtain mere subsistence, is forced to have recourse to labor." Jesus and his followers evidently belonged to the great majority who must work for a living, but not—the record plainly indicates—to the class often mentioned in the Gospels as "the poor."

The New Testament teaches us that we should pity poverty, but never suggests that we should praise it. "All the arguments that are brought to represent poverty as no evil," said Dr. Johnson, "show it to be a great evil. You never find people laboring to convince you that you may live very happily with a comfortable fortune." There is nothing in the New Testament to suggest the idea of Pope Pius X that "the poor should have Jesus in mind, who, though he might have been born in riches, made himself poor in order that he might ennoble poverty with incomparable merits for heaven." The rich man who "feasted sumptuously every day" and who looked the other way as he passed the beggar at his gate probably salved his uneasy conscience by ascribing the felicities of heaven to his wretched neighbor while he himself enjoyed the good things of earth. To Jesus and his followers poverty was no passport to heavenly favor.

That the parents of the infant Jesus were not affluent is indicated by the circumstances of his birth and by their humble offering of "a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.' " There is nothing in this to suggest that they were not able to pay their way. According to Matthew when Joseph was warned of the child's danger, he was able to take his little family to Egypt to stay until it should be safe to return to Nazareth. Luke tells us that after the return to Galilee "his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover." Hundreds of thousands of visitors crowded the city at this time. Josephus says it was "an innumerable multitude," and that the priests reported the number of lambs required for the paschal meal as 256,500. The annual pilgrimage from Galilee to Jerusalem was not to be undertaken by a family without money.

The Christian Church was not started on its way by the indigent and the incompetent. It is true that Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." His homelessness was not because of poverty, but because of the mission he had taken upon himself. He was no doubt a skilled workman. Until he left his home and undertook an itinerant preaching mission, it is reasonable to assume that he was quite able to provide a decent living for himself and those who were dependent on him.

We know that four of the apostolic group were fishermen. These four, Andrew, Peter, James, and John, were associated with Zebedee, the father of the latter two, in a fishing business, which in addition to the men named required the services of "hired servants." Moreover there were boats, nets, and other equipment which represented capital.

If, as is usually assumed, the Fourth Gospel was written by the apostle John, and it was he who was admitted to the court of Annas when Jesus was arrested, it must appear that the family of his father, Zebedee, was of some importance. "Simon Peter followed Jesus," says the account, "and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept the door, and brought Peter in."

Certainly there is nothing in the history to indicate that the high-priestly family were so democratically inclined as to include poverty-stricken fishermen among the acquaintances who were to receive special consideration at the door of the old aristocrat Annas. Even if it should appear that this "other disciple" were not the apostle, it is clear that there were persons of standing among the earliest followers of Jesus.

When the young ruler who "had great possessions" was told that he must part with his wealth and give to the poor, he turned sadly away. The sacrifice was too great. Then Jesus turned to his followers and said, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" and the disciples, writes Mark, were "amazed" at his words. Jesus then added, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Now according to Mark they were more than amazed. They were "exceedingly astonished" and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" The Greek word suggests shocked surprise.

These men would not have found this saying so disturbing had they been classed among the "poor" to whom the young ruler had been urged to distribute his wealth. This becomes clear when we read what Peter said, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you." Peter often spoke recklessly, but

his remarks always had point. His rejoinder does not make sense unless leaving the "everything" to which he refers meant a considerable sacrifice. We know that Peter had a home in Capernaum and that after the crucifixion "the disciple whom Jesus loved," presumably John, took the mother Mary into his own home. And we know that Matthew had been engaged in a business that paid well, whatever may have been the social standing of the men who followed it.

When the disciples understood Jesus to suggest that they go to the surrounding villages and buy food for a crowd of five thousand people, they must have known that there was a considerable sum of money in the bag that Judas carried. It is true that Luke, with his characteristic interest in the part women took, tells us that certain women who believed in Jesus contributed to his support, but there is no indication that they undertook the financing of the whole evangelistic party.[1]

The distinction between the disciples and the "poor" appears throughout the record. When the woman broke the jar of expensive ointment at the feet of Jesus, the disciples, says Matthew, were indignant and protested that "this ointment might have been sold for a large sum, and given to the poor." Jesus reminded them that the poor were always at hand to be helped. When Judas was told to do quickly what he had to do, they understood that Jesus was referring to his instructions to buy supplies or to "give something to the poor." When the twelve were sent out on their preaching campaign, they were instructed to take neither luggage nor money. "You received without pay," he said, "give without pay. Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper, in your purses." Men who had to be told not

[1] According to the Revised Standard Version the women "provided for them." In the King James Version they "ministered unto him." There is authority for both renderings, and we can judge only by what we deem most likely to have been the fact.

to carry gold nor silver with them at a time when a poor man never so much as saw a gold coin and seldom possessed a silver one were certainly not accustomed to living in poverty.

The important fact is that not only the "twelve" but the whole body of people who made up the Church in its beginnings were just about the kind of people who make up the Church today. There were poor people among them, but it is a mistake to assume that Christ's followers were recruited mainly among the destitute. The Christian way of life calls for sacrifice, but it does not make for poverty. Some of us look back to Scottish forefathers who had little money, but whose industry and thrift were such that they needed no man's charity. So it has always been. The mendicant orders of the Middle Ages were not made up of mendicants except as men voluntarily assumed the condition of poverty in the belief that God is more pleased with beggars than with those who earn their living.

In the book of Acts and in the Epistles we come upon plenty of evidence that Christianity did not make its way, as Nietzsche claimed, as a "slave's religion." When we are told that the people of the early Church "sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need," we may be sure that they had possessions to sell. "There was not a needy person among them," wrote Luke, "for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet."

When Paul tells us that the leaders at Jerusalem gave him the right hand of fellowship and charged him "to remember the poor," as he was eager to do, he does not class either them or himself among the poor people he is to help. It is true that he expresses his gratitude to those who "ministered to [his] necessities," but he also reminds his readers that he has been fully able to take care of himself financially. When he was in

Jerusalem, he paid the expenses of four men to enable them to "purify themselves" in the temple. In Caesarea, we are told, Felix kept Paul in prison because "he hoped that money would be given him by Paul." Felix had been a political favorite of the emperor Claudius and was related to Roman royalty by marriage. He was notorious for his rapacity, and it is certain that if he hoped for money from Paul, he was not looking for the kind of bribe a poor man could afford. It seems probable that Paul's circumstances had changed in his later years, possibly through inheritance. During his imprisonment he must have been under heavy expense. In Rome he lived in "his own hired house." We remember that Roman citizenship had been conferred upon his father. That, especially in a place like Tarsus, was not likely to happen to a Jew unless he were a person of distinction and ample means. The circumstances of Paul's education and the indications we have concerning his early career, before his conversion, all point to affluence and influence.

Paul's friend in Colosse, Philemon, whose slave absconded with his master's money, must have been well to do. According to Acts, Barnabas, Paul's partner in his early missionary enterprise, had been a landowner in Cyprus. His kinswoman Mary, the mother of Mark, is represented as living in a house in Jerusalem which must have been commodious to accommodate the "many" who met there for prayer. Lydia was "a seller of purple goods," a businesswoman dealing in a material worn only by the rich. Phoebe, the "helper of many and of myself [Paul] as well," appears to have been a woman of means and position in her community. Gaius, a member of the church at Corinth, had been converted during Paul's first visit to the city, and the apostle was entertained at his home during the later visit. "[He] is," wrote Paul, "host to me and to the whole church." The greeting from Gaius which Paul inserts at the end of the letter to the Roman church is coupled with

one from Erastus, the treasurer of the great city of Corinth.[2]

The first "believer" mentioned in connection with the first missionary journey is the Roman patrician Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, "a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God." It is thought that this may be the man cited in the *Natural History* of Pliny as an authority on Cyprian history.

The many warnings concerning the temptations of wealth, the indignation of James at the way in which the rich men of the churches conducted themselves toward their poorer neighbors, the exhortations to slaveowners to be kind and just to their slaves, the expressions of compassion for the poor and the repeated reminders of the Christian's duty toward them, must have been written with prosperous people in mind.

All this is important in our time when thrift and financial competence are not held in as general esteem as they have been in other days. It may be that our grandfathers were too much inclined to identify riches with the favor of God and to count their blessings in terms of property. We of our generation may be reminded that there is no reason why we should cease to thank God for the material necessities that Jesus included in his prayer for "daily bread," nor is there in his teaching any indication that being solvent is a sin.

During the past century in spite of war and depression there have been measurably successful efforts to ameliorate the condition of the abject poor as they were portrayed by Hogarth and described by Dickens. Horatio Alger's Ragged Dick and Tattered Tom and the poor Little Match Girl no longer wander hungry and neglected in our streets. Unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, and other humanitarian measures,

[2] Rom. 16:23. Acts 19:22 and I Tim. 4:20 may refer to the same man. Crispus, president of the synagogue at Corinth, was also one of Paul's converts. Acts 18:8-11.

added to the vast enterprises of organized charity, have brought relief to multitudes of the miserable. It is true that most of these efforts are merely palliative, and it is possible that some of them encourage the evil they are designed to cure. The problem, as all social workers know, is to help those who fall upon hard times while preserving and inspiring the moral qualities without which no material improvement will achieve permanent or significant results.

"Poverty," said the Greek historian Thucydides, "is no disgrace; the disgrace is in making no effort to escape it." In recent years many have been led into the error of supposing that to work as little as possible and to spend their wage as soon as possible is the way to promote the prosperity of the nation. Both in pulpits and in politics it has been assumed that there is something praiseworthy in insolvency and that the man who by industry and prudence has sought to provide for the future is quite possibly guilty of devious deeds. As we recall the beginnings of that faith which has inspired compassion for the sick, and old, and needy, and as we review the history of Christian humanitarianism, we realize that the movements and institutions which have most effectively contributed toward the help of the unfortunate have been organized and carried on by men and women who have earned a living for themselves, have put by something for a rainy day, and have still had something to give for the needs of people less provident, or less fortunate, than themselves.

Poverty is no pathway to God. It may be hard, indeed, for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, but neither is it easy for the man whose wife and children suffer want. Neither does a man yearn for heaven when his stomach yearns for meat. It has been observed that wealth brings no happiness. Some of us have had occasion to learn by experience that there is neither happiness nor virtue in an empty pocket.

10

Justice for Pontius Pilate

PONTIUS PILATE IS ONE OF THE MOST UNJUSTLY MALIGNED MEN of history. In the minds of millions the statement in the Apostles' Creed that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate" has made the Roman procurator responsible for a tragedy he sincerely tried to prevent.

The Jewish authorities were determined upon the death of Jesus. They hated him and feared him. The fanatical element among the Pharisees regarded him as a dangerous heretic. To the Sadducees he appeared as an agitator and reformer, a radical whose influence with the common people might lead to trouble in times that were already precarious enough. These men knew that Pilate was right when he said, "I have found no crime in him deserving death," but they reasoned as men have often reasoned. "It is expedient . . . ," they said, "that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." However wrong such an attitude may be, it is perfectly rational. Jesus was not the last victim of judicial murder done by men who believed that they were serving God and country by slaughtering the innocent. In our own times there have been instances of good men so misled by distorted orthodoxy or perverted patriotism as to disregard the fundamental principles of justice and humanity.

We must remember, as we consider Pilate, that the enemies of Jesus were powerful while there was nothing to fear from his friends. To Pilate this Galilean carpenter was a person of

no consequence. Over such people, as he reminded Jesus, he had the power of life and death, and no questions would be asked. On the other hand, the high priest of Israel was not a personage to be lightly flouted by a Roman politician. Palestine was one of the troublesome spots in the Roman system. Pilate's political career depended on his success in maintaining a semblance of peace with the leaders of a people easily incited to disorder, riot, and rebellion. Yet he persisted in his effort to save Jesus from the cross until the "chief priests" were forced to play their trump card and threaten to complain to Caesar that he was protecting a man guilty of treason. Treason was the one crime toward which no Roman officer could afford to be lenient. A man of far more importance than Pontius Pilate who allowed himself to be suspected of friendliness with rebels against the Roman rule would be in jeopardy of ruin, exile, or even death.

Pilate went further than most politicians would have done. He tried to persuade the Jewish authorities to try the prisoner according to their own law. They refused because they had not the power to condemn a man to death, and they were determined that Jesus should die. When it appeared that Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate sent him to Herod, the governor of that province, and Herod, having troubles enough of his own, promptly sent him back. Jesus had involved himself in trouble from three sources. He had according to the conservative Pharisees been guilty of heresy, he had attacked the privileges of the rich and exposed the corruption of the Sadducean bureaucrats, and he had made statements easily capable of being interpreted as treasonable. The case was full of dynamite, and Herod wisely wanted none of it.

Pilate tried to invoke the unwritten law by which a prisoner was released at the time of the Passover feast, but the crowd,

incited by the chief priests and scribes and principal men, shouted for the release of the outlaw Barabbas instead.

The spirit of Pilate's interview with Jesus was friendly. He did not speak a harsh word. He tried to make Jesus see the seriousness of his position. It was, he said, his own people who were accusing him. What was it that he had done? He gave Jesus every opportunity to tell his own story and to defend his actions, and he was puzzled and disturbed when the prisoner refused to do so. "Have you no answer to make?" he asked, "see how many charges they bring against you." "But Jesus," says the account, "made no further answer, so that Pilate wondered."

Over and over again Pilate declared his conviction that Jesus had committed no crime, and with each such declaration the fury of the crowd increased.

"And they cried out again, 'Crucify him.' And Pilate said to them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him.' " And Pilate said, " 'I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him.' But," says Luke, "they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed."

What more could the man have done? He knew that, even though he risked everything to save the prisoner, he would probably not succeed. Let us be reminded again that he had no motive for trying to save this man, who to him was only a Galilean workingman, except a decent sense of justice. Jesus was friendless. No man came forward to speak a word in his defense. One of his disciples had betrayed him, another had denied that he ever knew him, and the rest had according to Mark "forsaken him and fled."

"So," wrote Matthew, "when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water

and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' "

This washing of the hands is held against Pilate as the gesture of a weak and cowardly man. On the contrary it was a courageous repudiation of the actions of a group of men who were in a position to do him irreparable harm. Publicly by that symbolic act he dissociated himself from what was being done and declared his belief that an innocent man was being harried to the cross. He could gain no political advantage by doing this, but he risked bringing on himself the enmity of a powerful, fanatical, and unforgiving hierarchy. When they had gained their will and their victim was being sacrificed, Pilate caused an inscription to be placed on the cross, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." The chief priests objected. "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' " they said, "but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.' " Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." That was not the answer of a coward.

The Jewish leaders alone were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. That need involve no reflection on the character of the Jewish people, then nor at any other time. The writer of the Fourth Gospel refers to the persecutors of Jesus as "the Jews." When he wrote, he was an old man, looking back on the events of more than half a century before, forgetting or ignoring the fact that when these events took place, there was no distinction between Jew and Christian. Except Pilate all the actors in the drama, both enemies and friends of Jesus, were Jews. John himself was a Jew, Jesus was a Jew, all his followers were Jews, and the people who "heard him gladly," who hailed him as Messiah, and who the "chief priests" feared might rise to his defense were also Jews. Jesus was crucified by men who were moved by that hate that is begotten by

prejudice, pride, intolerance, and the love of power. From that and its tragic consequences no nation has been free.

It is unfair to judge an individual by the moral standards of a civilization more enlightened than his own. Pilate in this instance exemplified the ethics of his time. Many students of Roman life regard Cicero as "the noblest Roman of them all," as Shakespeare makes Mark Antony describe Brutus. It is probable that Cicero and certain that Brutus, versed in Roman law and tradition as they were, would not have managed matters more wisely or more courageously than did Pilate. That Pilate was afterward removed from his office for cause is entirely beside the point. The relevant fact is that he held his place for a dozen years as governor of a rebellious and recalcitrant people.

It is true that the sentence of death could not have been carried out without the consent of Pilate, but to make him responsible for the tragedy is to ignore the limits of what we may expect from men as well as to disregard the facts as they are given in all the Gospels. If he had resisted the demands of the chief priests and put his career in jeopardy for the sake of a Galilean carpenter of whom he knew little or nothing, he would have been one of the heroes of history. He was not a hero. He was a trained political administrator in charge of one of the most difficult provinces in the Roman world. The efficiency and honesty of such men was a surprise to the observers of the time. When Pompey was charged with the task of freeing the Mediterranean from the pirates who infested it, he finished the job in three months—a typical Roman performance. The Greek historian Polybius remarked that a Greek politician entrusted with a talent of gold would be unable to keep his fingers off it, though there were ten bookkeepers to check his accounts, but a Roman would handle hundreds of talents with no security except his word.

In the ancient Coptic church Pilate was regarded as a saint because of his efforts to save Jesus from the cross. He was neither the cowardly wretch of Western tradition nor the saintly hero of the Copts. He was a Roman politician, taking graft and bribery as necessary evils, as American politicians often do, ambitious for wealth and power, and capable, like most Romans of his class, of callous ruthlessness or tolerant good nature according to circumstances.

Nowhere in the New Testament is Pilate condemned. On the contrary all the accounts are distinctly favorable to him. The men who were responsible for the cross of Christ judged themselves when they said, "His blood be on us and on our children." And Jesus judged Pilate when he said to him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."

II

The Friendly Romans

WHEREVER YOU GO IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, YOU ARE SURE TO meet a Roman, and in nearly every case you will find a man disposed to be friendly and just. The wealthy Roman was often inclined to philanthropy. The officer whose slave was sick and whose Jewish neighbors came to Jesus in his behalf was typical of the first-rate Roman character of the time.[1]

When he was not avenging himself or amusing himself in the inhuman fashion of the time, the Roman was more tolerant, more just, and even more humane than were the military aggressors of recent years. One of the reasons for Rome's success in her administration of a huge and scattered empire was the freedom she allowed to the provinces she ruled. Each unit of her dominion was governed by an officer whose authority was backed by Roman legionaries. Taxes must be paid, the Roman rule must be acknowledged and obeyed, and woe betide any who rebelled; but when so much was fulfilled, a large measure of liberty and self-government was permitted. The emperor Titus was not without justification when in his oration to the rebellious Jews he charged them with ingratitude in failing to appreciate the magnanimity with which the Romans had treated them.[2] As to Roman cruelty the persecutions of the Christians, which lasted from the time of Nero to the beginning of the fourth century, were not as ruthlessly effec-

[1] See Luke 7:2-3.

[2] Josephus, *The Jewish War,* VI. VI. 2.

tive as the persecution of the Huguenots in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nor were they more horrible than the brutalities visited upon the innocent during recent times.

The cruelty of the Roman was not the expression of hate, but of insensibility. It was brutal, but it was not malicious. To him the setting of two gladiators to killing each other in the arena was little different from setting two cocks to killing each other in the cockpit. It was an amusing spectacle, and life was cheap. Without compunction he killed others, and without compunction he killed himself when the time was fitting. The Romans massacred thousands of Jews when Pompey and his army entered Jerusalem, not because they hated Jews, as the Nazis of Germany did, but because in any conflict between any people and the authority of the state human life meant nothing. When the Roman tortured a criminal or slew an enemy, he did not try to justify himself on the ground that he was serving God, as Christians have often done. He was not conscious of needing any justification.

The treatment of Jesus by the soldiers, when they put on him the crown of thorns and hailed him as king of the Jews, was simply brutal horseplay. It was the Roman soldier's idea of fun. An interesting parallel to it appears in Plutarch's *Life of Pompey*, in which he tells how the Mediterranean pirates amused themselves with a prisoner. He wrote:

> When any of the captives claimed to be a Roman citizen and told his name, they pretended to be surprised and, feigning fear, fell down at his feet, humbly beseeching him to forgive them. The captive, seeing them so humble and abject, believed them to be in earnest. Some of them now proceeded to put Roman shoes on his feet and to dress him in a Roman gown, to prevent, they said, being mistaken another time. After all this ceremony, when they had thus deluded and mocked him long enough, they put

out a ship's ladder in the midst of the sea, and wished him a pleasant journey, and if he resisted, they threw him overboard and drowned him.

We must remember that in New Testament times there was nowhere in the world that regard for the sacredness of human life and personality which is essential to the teaching of Jesus. Nor do we forget that Christians have prayed to God, in the name of Christ, for help in such enterprises as the slaughter of the Albigenses in the thirteenth century in a murderous crusade against heretics launched by a pope appropriately named Innocent. Man's inhumanity to man has always been man's curse and continues to be so in our own enlightened age.

That there were noble, humane men and women among the Romans is evident. Such men as Seneca had a broad and humane outlook on the world. "We are all members of a great body," he said. "Nature has made us akin by birth, and you must live for others if you wish to live for yourself." Paul's idea of the brotherhood of man, whether Greek, barbarian, slave, or free, had been taught by the Stoic philosophers long before his time, as he reminded his hearers when he preached in Athens.[3] "The Roman mind," wrote Robert Flint of the University of Edinburgh, "recognized that there was One Law, embracing all nations and all times, which no senate or people had created or could annul, and which enjoined universal justice and universal benevolence."[4] "The foundation of law," said Cicero, "is the fact that, by Nature, we incline to love men." Of Roman life in the period following the apostolic age J. S. Reid of Cambridge University said, "Probably

[3] See Acts 17:26-29.

[4] Quoted by John Howard Crawford, *The Brotherhood of Mankind* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Co., 1895).

in no age, not even in our own, have men spent their accumulated resources so freely for the benefit of their fellow men. . . . The range of practical benevolence in the early centuries of the Roman Empire has rarely, if ever, been realized by historians." [5]

Nor was the Roman Empire the complete moral cesspool that well-informed people often assume it to have been. Preachers often talk as if the pagan world had been a world of moral perverts and as if there had not been even in the worst period of Roman history a strong Puritan influence at work. Many have the impression that the empire collapsed because of the moral rottenness of the Roman people. Rome never collapsed. The title of Gibbon's famous history *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is misleading. Rome declined but never fell. It rose, as the British Empire rose in modern times; it reached its peak and declined, until its history became merged in the history of Europe. We should consider whether a morally rotten people could have endured in power for seven or eight hundred years.

The apostle Paul was not thinking of the Romans in particular when he wrote his fiery indictment of the immorality of the time in his letter to the Roman church. His special indignation was against hypocritical Jews. "If you call yourself a Jew . . . and boast of your relation to God . . . ," he says, "who say that one must not commit adultery, do you [yourself] commit adultery? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?"

The attitude of the Romans toward the people of the New Testament is usually represented as having been tolerant and just. There is no evidence to support the view that the writers, especially Luke, deliberately planned to present the Romans in a favorable light in order to discredit the Jews. Such an

[5] From "Charity," Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics.*

incident as the dismissal of the charge against Paul by the Roman governor Gallio was typically Roman. Gallio was the brother of the philosopher and statesman Seneca, who described him as lovable, friendly, just, and virtuous. He had hardly begun his administration as proconsul, in Corinth, when a delegation of Jews came before him with a trumped-up charge against Paul. His decision was swift and just, and the apostle was discharged. It would have been easy for Gallio to gain a little popularity with the Jewish zealots by siding with them against the man from Tarsus, and Roman provincial administrators needed all the popularity they could get. The Roman power was not patient with unsuccessful servants, and trouble with the Jews was the cause of many a provincial official's downfall. "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime," said Gallio, "I should have reason to bear with you, O Jews; but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves; I refuse to be a judge of these things."

Paul's trouble in Ephesus arose because it was thought that his preaching was hurting business. Preachers of our own time have been known to get into hot water for the same reason. In other cities the Greeks were disposed to be amiable and interested, but in Ephesus the preaching of the gospel touched men's pockets, and there was an outcry against it. An important business in the city was the making and selling of shrines for private devotion to the goddess Artemis.[6] When the new faith began to make converts, a maker of silver shrines, one Demetrius, stirred up the businessmen against the Christians, who in those early days had no use for images. "Men," said

[6] See Acts 19:21-41. The name Diana in the old versions is an error. The Ephesian Artemis was an idol, supposed to have fallen on the city from heaven, and was a local affair not to be identified with either the Greek Artemis or the Roman Diana.

Demetrius, "you know that from this business we have our wealth. . . . This Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable company of people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods." So they raised a mob and incited a riot. It was a Roman official who brought the crowd to its senses by a masterly exposition of the Roman law and saved Paul from a situation that might have ended his career then and there.

Claudius Lysias was a Roman tribune. His letter to the governor Felix, recorded in the twenty-third chapter of Acts, is a fair sample of the way in which such men handled the difficult cases that came before them in Jewish provinces. Lysias was in command of troops stationed in the Tower of Antonia in Jerusalem when Paul made his last visit to the city. The apostle had rashly ventured to go there during a feast when trouble was most likely to arise. There was a riot, from which the Roman soldiery rescued Paul. Lysias was informed of a plot to assassinate the apostle. He decided to smuggle Paul out of the city and send him to Caesarea with a letter to the governor Felix explaining the situation.

Felix was a bad Roman. "He used," wrote Tacitus, "the powers of a king with the disposition of a slave." He pretended to believe the charge of Paul's enemies that he was "a pestilent fellow, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the world." According to the account in Acts, Felix kept Paul in prison for two years, for "he hoped that money would be given him by Paul." When at the end of that time he was removed from office, "he would surely have been punished," wrote Josephus, "unless Nero had yielded to the pleas of his brother, Pallas."

"Felix," wrote Luke, "was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison." Josephus represents Festus as an able and just man, and there is nothing in the New Testament account to suggest that he was otherwise. He seems to have been puzzled by Paul's case and

uncertain as to what he ought to do. When King Agrippa and his wife arrived to welcome Festus to his new position, the relief of the governor at having counsel in the case from higher authority is evident. This Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great, was one of the most adroit politicians of his time, the friend and adviser of two emperors, Caligula and Claudius. Though by blood an Idumean Jew, he was a Roman by childhood training and education, and his conduct of the hearing of Paul's case and the consideration with which he heard Paul's magnificent defense were in keeping with the fairness and dignity with which Roman officials, generally, treated the people of the early Church.

Whatever may have been the faults of the Romans, they were usually free from what Jesus called "the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." They had a gift for organization and a genius for law unmatched by any other ancient people. It is significant that while we of the western nations look to the Greeks for our art and philosophy and to the Jews for our religion, our courts of justice are indebted to the Romans for their traditions. Our terms in natural science, medicine, and philosophy are Greek, but the jargon of the lawyers comes down to us from the Roman courts. From the Roman system the Continental nations directly derived their principles of justice and their rules of practice, and though the English courts have resisted the invasion of their system by Continental traditions, they still owe much to Roman jurisprudence.

The one man who made an effort to save Jesus from the Cross was the Roman governor Pilate. It was a Roman soldier who held the moistened sponge to the lips of the suffering Savior, a centurion of the Roman army who said, "Truly this was a son of God!" and another Roman officer of whom Jesus had said, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."

That which the Roman lacked was the one thing Jesus sought to impress on his disciples as he spoke of their relation to other men. It is the one thing that through all the Christian centuries the Christian has been most reluctant to accept. Despite the teaching of the Stoic masters the Roman had little regard for the sacredness of human personality. Thus in our own day nations are in jeopardy of final ruin through the adoption by a mighty government of the doctrine that a man possesses no right and is subject to no law nor destiny save such as those who happen to be in power in the state may from time to time decree. Roman justice was a policy of the state, not an acknowledgement of the unalienable rights of men.

At least the Roman was no hypocrite. When Pilate, having done what he could to save Jesus, "handed him over to them to be crucified," he acted from motives of political expediency, a fact he would have admitted without equivocation. The Roman did not drive the nails through the hands and feet of Jesus for the glory of God. When he sacked and massacred, he did not, as later potentates in his ancient city did, clasp his hands in holy humility and sing a *Te Deum* in praise of the merciful Providence he professed to serve in slaughtering his fellow men.

Perhaps it would be well for us, the people of a Christian nation, in these times, when we have loosed upon a sleeping city a destruction as ruthless as any which the Roman power ever visited upon its enemies, to think upon these things. The best antidote for the poison of Christian pride is a page or two of Christian history.

12

Some Saints from Africa

THE GREAT DISRAELI, WHO WAS A JEW, ONCE REMINDED HIS colleagues in the British parliament that when their forefathers were "chasing each other around trees, armed with stone hatchets," his own were a people of a culture already ancient, engaged in creating the superb literature of the Old Testament. So, in the land across the Mediterranean,

> Where Afric's sunny fountains
> Roll down their golden sand,

there was a flourishing civilization many centuries before our northern ancestors emerged from the semisavage state in which the invading Romans found them.

The man who bore the cross of Christ up the hill of Golgotha was an African. Among the adventurous souls who first sent missionaries to bear the cross to distant nations there were men from Africa. More than four hundred years before Augustine and his little band of missionaries made their way to heathen England, half expecting to be eaten there by cannibals, a church synod was held at Carthage attended by eighty-seven African bishops. The earlier, and greater, Augustine, whose genius still influences the thought of the Western world, was born and lived most of his life in Africa. Christian theology first took form, not in Italy, but in Africa, where Tertullian, "the father of theology," was born and where the first transla-

tions of the Old Testament books, which became the basis of Jerome's Vulgate, were made.

On a great bulge of land reaching out into the Mediterranean halfway between Carthage and Alexandria was the city of Cyrene, famous for the beauty of its situation, its wealth, and its culture. One third of its population were Jews, many of whom made pilgrimages to Jerusalem at the time of the great feasts. Among these devout pilgrims was the man named Simon, who came to the holy city, perhaps accompanied by his wife and two sons, at the time of the Passover about the year A.D. 29 or 30. It was he who carried the cross of Christ up the rocky hill. "And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country,[1] the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross," says Mark. We meet with Simon's wife and one of his sons later when Paul writes, "Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine." The identification of Simon in Mark's book by reference to his sons suggests that their names were well known in the early church. The name Alexander appears twice in references which may be to this brother of the "choice Christian" Rufus. One occurs in the story of the riot in the theater at Ephesus when Alexander, a member of Paul's party, attempted to speak in defense of the apostle and was shouted down. The other is in the first letter to Timothy, "By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith, among them Hymenaeus and Alexander." In the second letter to Timothy, Hymenaeus is mentioned as having strayed into the error of Gnosticism, and it is probable that Alexander went the same way.

[1] The Greek word *agros*, translated "country," is used in the Septuagint for the Hebrew *sadeh*, meaning a field, open ground, territories, or towns. What Mark means is that Simon came from "out of town." See Septuagint, Ruth 1:1; Mark 6:56; 15:21.

As Simon bore the cross of Jesus, so his wife helped bear the cross of his great apostle. The family had moved to Rome, where Rufus was one of the church leaders, when Paul wrote, "Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine." The greeting suggests the gratitude of a man who was subject to painful bouts of sickness for the tender care given him by a devoted woman, who was a mother to him.

Among the enterprising and broad-minded group in Antioch, to whom more than to any other people we owe the Christian Church today, were several of Simon's fellow townsmen from Cyrene, in Africa. Luke writes of the Jews who were scattered "as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch." Among them there were converts to Christ who preached "to none except Jews." He says:

> But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord. News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

The history of the Christian Church really began there and then. What had gone before, since Christ was "taken up," had been preparatory. Barnabas set about finding an assistant and decided on Paul. The work grew, and the people of the Church began to be known as "Christians." Even the name of Christianity we owe to these people, who gladly adopted the epithet bestowed on them in ridicule by the wits of Antioch. Of the group of three men besides Barnabas and Paul who first conceived the plan of a mission to the Gentiles, "Lucius of Cyrene" and probably "Symeon who was called Niger" were from Africa.

Those African coastal cities were no upstarts. They had cen-

turies on centuries of history behind them. Shakespeare's thought went back to them when he wrote of Lorenzo and Jessica looking, as young lovers do, up to the starry sky. And Lorenzo says:

> In such a night,
> Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
> Upon the wild sea-banks, and waft her love
> To come again to Carthage.

She waft in vain, for the charming Aeneas had sailed on to take a wife in Italy.

On that north African coast, where American boys were marching a few years ago, the Phoenicians had established cities long before Disraeli's ancestors had broken away from their bondage in Egypt. In those early days Phoenicia ruled the waves. There is a magnificent description of her ships in the twenty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel. The spirit that sent the early Church into its world-wide conquests may well have been imparted by a culture that had first sent men out through the Pillars of Hercules to discover the Atlantic, and whose merchants long before the time of Christ made their way to Spain to trade for silver and up to wild Wales for tin.

The preacher Apollos, whose eloquence attracted Aquila and Priscilla, was a north African from Alexandria, the city which had supplanted Athens as the intellectual center of the world. It was there that Euclid wrote his *Geometry,* that Aristarchus measured the sun and moon, and that Hipparchus discovered the precession of the equinoxes, catalogued over a thousand stars, and founded scientific astronomy. There was the home of the Jewish philosopher Philo, from whom John is supposed to have derived his doctrine of the Logos, or Word. It was in an Alexandrian ship that Paul made his famous

voyage on the way to Rome. And if we may judge from his usual habit of quoting the Old Testament, it was a Greek translation of the sacred Scriptures, made in Alexandria, that he carried with him on his journey, unless this was among the books and parchments he had left behind in Troas.[2]

"The field," said Jesus, "is the world." The gospel was to be carried to all nations. The point we should keep in mind is that as all the nations received it, so all the nations contributed to it. The New Testament is not simply a continuation, or consummation, of the Old. The contribution of Israel to Christianity is vital, as the New Testament writers constantly affirm, but in the coming of Christ a "new covenant" was set up, as he himself said, to supplant the old. "If any one is in Christ," wrote Paul, "he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

It might be important to the Jew to be assured that Jesus was the Son of David, but to the Gentiles he was the Son of Man. Thus the "saints" of the New Testament are "men from every nation under heaven, . . . Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians." The first recorded sermon of the Christian Church was preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost. Like a modern preacher he took a text, "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." [3] In the gospel of Christ the experience, the aspirations, and the destiny of every people, everywhere, are involved.

[2] See II Tim. 4:13.

[3] Peter is quoting Joel 2:28.

13

The Hyphenated Hebrews

To understand the history of the early church we must take into account the feeling that existed between the old-fashioned Palestinian Jews, who spoke the Aramaic language and kept themselves aloof from other nations, and the Grecian Jews, or Hellenists, who had adopted the language and in part the manners and customs of the Greeks.

The first officers of the Church, apart from the apostles, were appointed because of trouble between these two classes of Christian converts. In the sixth chapter of Acts we are told that "in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution." The situation became so acute that a commission of seven men was set up to see that the benevolent funds of the Church were fairly disbursed.

The conservative Jews' rancor against the Hellenists went back to the time of Alexander the Great. Alexander's dream was the Grecianizing of the world. Greek was made the official language of the conquered territories, and Greek customs and observances were imposed upon the people. Many Jews yielded to the charm of the Greek way of life, adopted Greek dress and spoke the language. Up to this time the Jews had been an agricultural people. Even in the time of Josephus, whose death occurred at about the same time as that of the apostle John, there was a prejudice against trade among old-

fashioned Jews. "We have no liking for commerce," he wrote, "nor for the relations with foreigners which it entails." This attitude is reflected in Mark 7:4, "When they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves." It was the enforced contact with Gentile life that made a trader of the Jew. To the people of the "Dispersion," who were obliged to settle in foreign lands, the ownership of land was difficult if not forbidden, and they were forced to resort to business to make a living.

Despite the opposition of the Hasidean or "pious party" which was the forerunner of the Pharisees the infiltration into Jewish life of the Greek culture went on. Young Jews attracted by the freedom of Gentile life found the narrow nationalism and repressive traditionalism of their fathers irksome. Jesus' story of the prodigal son was the story of thousands of young men, and among his hearers there must have been many restless sons and anxious parents. In the parable the young man longs for the glamor and freedom of Gentile life in the "far country" while his unimaginative elder brother sticks to the farm. If we had met that young fellow, surrounded by his city companions in "riotous living," we should have seen a Jewish youth dressed in the latest Greek fashion and doing his best to be taken for a Greek. Such young men went to scandalous lengths to conceal their Jewish origin. As the first book of Maccabees expresses it, "They made themselves uncircumcised." Josephus says they concealed the fact that they had been circumcised so that, when they exercised in the gymnasium, "even when they were naked they might appear to be Greeks." [1]

When the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes had seized Jeru-

[1] *Antiquities* XII. v. 1. See I Cor. 7:18 for Paul's allusion to this practice.

salem in 170 B.C., he realized that his dominion would never be secure while the national religion of the Jews survived to inspire the people with the spirit of revolt. He sent the Greek general Apollonius to the city with orders to stamp out the ancient faith by force. The sacred temple was desecrated by the sacrifice of swine. Every village was required to set up a heathen altar, and king's officers were appointed to see that the people made sacrifice before it. Some of the Jews were willing, as some of the French were willing to collaborate with the Germans in forcing Nazism on France. Others yielded with a mental reservation, as Korean Christians did during the Japanese occupation when they were required to make their vows before a Shinto shrine. "Many of Israel," says the writer of Maccabees, "consented to his [the king's] worship and sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath." It was this situation that led to the revolt begun by the aged priest Mattathias, who saw a Jew sacrificing at a Greek altar and was so enraged that he killed both him and the government agent who stood by. Calling on all patriots to follow him, he fled to the mountains, where it was as difficult for the government troops to deal with him and his followers as it was for the British to conquer the fiercely rebellious Highlanders of Scotland. After his death his son Judas Maccabaeus led the Jewish patriots to victory over their oppressors, and Israel entered on its last brief period of free statehood until the establishment of the Israeli state in our own time, more than twenty centuries later.

We have dwelt at some length on this story because it explains both the mortal antagonism against Jesus on the part of the reactionary Pharisees and the bitter feuds which disturbed the peace of the early Church. Jesus was in full accord with the great prophetic writings of the Old Testament, but he repudiated much of the teaching of the Pharisees, who were fanatically determined to keep the ancient enmities aflame. The

first converts to Jesus were Jews, who had been brought up in an atmosphere of race prejudice and pride. Many, although persuaded to accept Jesus as the expected Messiah, were unable to accept an uncircumcised Gentile convert as equal to themselves in the kingdom of God. When Paul carried Christ's teaching to its logical conclusion and declared that "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek," that "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring," and that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail," he brought upon himself the enmity of the orthodox. To these "Hebrews" as they are called in Acts the religion of Jesus was a Messianic variation of the ancient faith or, as Jesus had warned his disciples, an attempt to confine new wine in old wineskins. To the Gentile Christians the religion of Jesus was a new way of life.

Through all his stormy career the apostle Paul struggled with the animosities which grew out of Jewish prejudice against anything Greek. It was for this reason that he made much of his own Hebrew birth and training. "Are they Hebrews?" he says. "So am I. . . . Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I." "[I am] of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee." When he addressed the riotous mob in Jerusalem who thought he had defiled the temple by bringing a heathen into it, he was careful to speak in the Hebrew tongue. "And when they heard that he addressed them in the Hebrew language," says Luke, "they were the more quiet." He began his defense by assuring them that he was as Jewish as any of them. "I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers."

The Hebrew tongue in which Paul spoke was not the Hebrew in which most of the Old Testament was written. As early as the eighth century before Christ the Aramaic tongue

had been in use in Palestine.[2] By the time of Alexander the Great it was supplanting the pure Hebrew. It was a more hospitable and adaptable speech, and by New Testament times it had assimilated words and idioms from Assyrian, Greek, Persian, and other sources and had become the spoken language of the people. In much the same way and for the same reasons the language of most Jews since the sixteenth century has been Yiddish (Jewish), which employs the Hebrew alphabet and to a basic German vocabulary has added a mixture of Hebrew, Aramaic, Slavic, and other words and grammatical forms. In spite of themselves the most orthodox Jews had been influenced by the changing times, and Pharisaism was in part a movement to prevent any further contamination of the ancient culture or any further yielding to worldly expediency by the ancient people.

Paul was as intensely concerned for the preservation of Israel as a nation as any Pharisee. Yet it was to "the nations" that he believed himself set apart to proclaim the gospel. "I am," he said, "an apostle to the Gentiles." It was among Greek-speaking people that he found his helpers and from whom he got his support. Those who sought to undermine his work were "Hebrews of the Hebrews," like himself. "A man's foes," said Jesus, "will be those of his own household." The truth of this observation has been manifest in history down to our own time. No animosity has been more bitter, nor any persecution more ruthless, than that of men who professed the name of Jesus against their fellow Christians whose views on matters yet to be revealed differed from their own.

Though Christianity was rooted in the ancient faith of Israel, the way of progress for the infant Church was Greek, not Hebrew. It was among the believers in Gentile Antioch that the command of Jesus to go and teach the nations was

[2] See Isa. 36:11.

put into practical effect, and Paul and Barnabas were sent out on the first great adventure in foreign missions. Jesus himself had confined his ministry "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" and had avoided the parts of Palestine where large Gentile populations were settled. When he sent out his disciples, he charged them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans." But as the Church found its way from Judea to Samaria and "through the region of Galatia and Phrygia," the ferment of its truth increased, the new wine could no longer be confined in the old wineskins, and the Grecian Jews were the men who set it free.

We should not be reluctant to recognize the Greek elements in Christianity. Its roots are in the Old Testament, but to the fruits of it the Gentiles, from the beginning, made their contribution. The Jewish nation, says Paul, is the living tree. Onto it the Gentile is grafted. "You, a wild olive shoot," he says, "were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree." That the language of the early Church was Greek is evident from the fact that the New Testament was written in that language, though there were, doubtless, contributory documents written in Aramaic. Paul's letters reveal his acquaintance with Greek literature. The friendships he made, his reliance on Greek assistants, and his completely cosmopolitan outlook were no part of his upbringing as a Pharisee. He was proud of being "a Hebrew of the Hebrews," but he was at least half Gentile in his thinking.

The doctrine of the "Logos," or "Word," which is stated at the beginning of John's Gospel and throughout his writings, as it is in parts of Paul's letters and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, is found, not in the Hebrew prophets, but in Greek philosophy. Certain liturgical practices appear to have been taken over by the early Church from Greek sources, a fact which has been absurdly overstated by some writers, but

which is not to be repudiated on that account. That some of the Christian holidays and festivals were taken from pagan celebrations is generally admitted.

Although Jesus in ancestry and upbringing was like Paul a Hebrew of the Hebrews, he was no more a typical Jew in spirit than his great apostle. It was because of his impatience with the orthodoxy of his time that he drew upon himself the deadly hostility of the Pharisees. It is probable that Jesus spoke Greek, though he was not a Hellenist. That he habitually spoke Aramaic is certain, but we remember that he held what must have been an extended discussion with Pilate. There is no indication that an interpreter was present. It would be a part of the qualification of a Roman administrator to speak Greek, but it is entirely unlikely that Pilate knew the language of the Palestinian Jews. Educated Romans knew Greek as a matter of course, read Greek literature and sometimes wrote in Greek instead of Latin. And in Palestine there were districts where it was as common for the Jews to be bilingual as it is for the people of Switzerland today.

There were noble elements in the Greek mystery religions. An inscription from a temple in Rhodes in the time of Hadrian contains a list of rules, the first of which is "to be pure and unblemished in hand and heart and to be free from an evil conscience." The Christian idea of conscience, by the way, is Greek. No word that can be translated "conscience" appears in the Old Testament. "In Jewish teaching," wrote Rabbi Moses Gaster, "the legal and the purely ethical have never been really separated but have been treated as concomitant principles." [3] In ancient Israel, particularly after the time of Ezra, it was the external law that judged a man. At about the time when the Jews, having been freed from captivity in Baby-

[3] From "Conscience," Hastings, *op. cit.*

lon, were imposing on themselves what Paul calls "captivity to the law" the Greek thinkers of the fifth century before Christ were seeing the nobler truth that men had a judge in their own hearts. It was for the Greek idea that Paul fought so gallantly to free his converts from the bondage of the law.

Christianity's debt to the "hyphenated" Hebrew, the Grecian Jew, cannot be overstated. It was he who liberated it from the cramping orthodoxy of those who would have smothered it in ancient tradition and made of it a Jewish sect. It was the Hellenist who caught the vision of Christ as Paul saw it and as Christ had expressed it when he said, "The field is the world. . . . Go and teach all nations." For the evidences of Greek influence in the New Testament and for the Hellenism of so many of the early founders of the Church we need make no apology. Certainly there is no wisdom in attempting to deny the fact. Nor does common sense commend the proposal of some scholars to screen out the Greek elements and discard them, leaving only what they choose to call the "primitive gospel." Thus, they say, we should be able to sit at the feet of Jesus as did Mary and receive his teaching entirely free from the additions made to it by Paul and his Hellenistic friends.

That these "foreign" elements are present in all parts of the New Testament is in keeping with the universal character of Christianity and the universal character of Christ.

14

The Man from Samaria

For jews," wrote John, "have no dealings with samaritans." There was good reason for that. The feud between the two peoples, who worshiped the same God and read the same Scriptures, had been going on since the time of Ezra, more than four hundred years before the time of Christ. Injuries, insults, and reprisals had been passed from generation to generation between the orthodox Jews and these people whom they regarded as a contemptible mongrel race. The Jewish historian Josephus, who was doubtless prejudiced, tells many tales of Samaritan outrages, of their idolatries and their habit of siding with the Jews or with their enemies according to which side promised the most profit to themselves.

At the time of Jesus the feeling was intensely bitter. A conservative Jew would not set foot in Samaritan territory, nor would he even pronounce the name of the hated race.[1] If he had to go from Jerusalem up into Galilee, he would make a detour of perhaps twenty miles to avoid passing through Samaria. "He that eateth the food of the Samaritans," said the rabbis, "is as he that eateth swines' flesh." The Samaritan woman whom Jesus met by the well near Sychar was naturally astonished when he not only spoke to her but was willing to accept a drink of water at her hands. So, at a later time were

[1] We notice in the parable of the good Samaritan how the lawyer avoids pronouncing the word "Samaritan," saying instead, "The one who showed mercy." Luke 10:25-37.

his hearers astonished, and many were no doubt scandalized when he made a Samaritan the hero of one of his parables and set him up as an example for a Jew to follow.

The success with which Jesus dealt with the scribes and Pharisees was in large part due to his adroitness in getting the discussion away from academic tradition and into the realm of practical human experience. Thus the parable of the good Samaritan begins with a "lawyer" or scribe all set to argue about the relation of the law to eternal life and ends with a Samaritan and a cash transaction on the Jericho road.

"A lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' "

Jesus quoted the lawyer's own law, putting together a saying from Deuteronomy and one from Leviticus.

"You know perfectly well what you must do. It is written in your law. You must love your God, and you must love your neighbor."

"And," asked the lawyer, "who is my neighbor?"

That question, we may be sure, was one of the favorites with the legalistic hairsplitters of the time, who loved to take a piece of plain common sense from the Old Testament and complicate and bedevil it until its meaning was lost in a maze of argument. There are more than forty references to a man's duty to his neighbor in the Pentateuch alone, and the rest of the day could have been spent comparing them and setting one against another.

Jesus refused to enter into any such discussion. Instead he told a story. He fixed the scene right there on the spot. Over there in the ditch, he said, a man was lying hurt and helpless. He had been set upon by some of the thugs that infested the neighborhood. They robbed him and beat him and left him there, perhaps to die. Along came a priest. He was probably thinking of some finespun theory about God or cogitating a

clever answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" He passed by on the other side, getting as far away from human distress as he could. Then a lawyer came along. Not being a priest he got a little nearer to the human problem, took one look and went away. Then came a Samaritan, probably a businessman, riding on a donkey. He may not have known much about God or the law, but he was human. He dismounted, examined the wounded traveler, took stuff from his saddlebag and administered first aid. Then he lifted the man onto his donkey and took him down the road to a wayside inn.

"Take care of him," he told the innkeeper, "and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back." And he gave him two coins. Jesus was a carpenter, and those two coins might be two days' pay for a skilled workman, something like thirty cents.

"Now," said Jesus, "learn from that Samaritan who your neighbor is, and if you want to inherit eternal life, follow his example."

Did you ever notice how much of life is crowded into that story of about three hundred words? It begins, where most things begin, with a man's concern about himself. Then it goes back to the ancient law of Leviticus and then to the question that is of such vital concern to the world today, "Who is my neighbor?" From there Jesus takes the whole question out of the realm of books and lawyers, out into the open road where honest men trade, thieves steal, the unfortunate cry for help, and people live and labor. And the story ends with a man with his hand in his pocket, ready to put down the hard cash to back his belief that a man ought to help his fellow man.

That's the story of the Samaritan saint. It begins with a question about a man's soul and ends with thirty cents. It starts with heaven and ends on the highway. It finds the secret of eternal life in the action of a plain man, going about

his daily business, with no claim to social standing, to special favor with God, nor to outstanding righteousness, but with the kind of humanity in his heart that expresses itself in unpretentious kindness to his neighbor.

We must not pare the requirements of a Christian discipleship down to the daily "good deed" of the Boy Scout, but it may surprise us to be reminded of how much stress the New Testament lays on the kind of humanity illustrated in this story of the good Samaritan. Most people who claim to be civilized are, theoretically, philanthropists. Most of them are, practically, selfish. They are noble in sentiment, but tight with cash. They believe in helping the unfortunate, but they do not want to be troubled with other people's troubles. When that Samaritan got off his donkey and bound up the traveler's wounds, he had to be willing to put aside his own convenience —which you and I dislike to do. When he put his hand in his pocket and paid out good money for a stranger, he had to be ready to pay what it costs to be a neighbor.

When on Easter Sunday multitudes of people go to church and hear Paul's great passage on the future life, which begins, "Now is Christ risen from the dead," the hopes of countless generations of believers rise in their hearts. This mortal life, now in weakness, is to be raised in power. Death is shorn of its sting. "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory." What follows, when the apostle has soared to heavenly places on the wings of faith, is one of the most significant transitions in all the Bible. "Now," he says, "concerning the collection for the saints," and goes on to give precise instructions as to how the victory over death is to be implemented with hard cash. To link these things together in this blunt fashion would seem to some of us almost like sacrilege, but Paul was not troubled by any such false delicacy.

We know of no word of Jesus indicating that, unless we

hold this or that view of divinity, or atonement, or millennium, we have no part with him, but in one of the most thrilling of his parables he lays down one definite condition for acceptance with God. He imagines all mankind drawn up before the Sovereign for judgment. Some are welcomed to the kingdom; some are rejected and doomed to misery. Those who are "blessed of my Father" are the people who have fed the hungry, comforted the sick, and visited the imprisoned. Those who are cast away are those who have failed to befriend the unfortunate. "Truly," says the King, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

No doubt the lawyer's question was sincere enough. Men were seeking then, as they are seeking now, some answer to the riddle of life. In every man's mind and heart the ancient question is echoed, "What must I do to be saved?" So Jesus told the story of the wounded traveler and the priest, the lawyer and the humble member of an outcast people.

"Which of these three," he asked, "do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

The lawyer said, "The one who showed mercy on him."

And Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."

In a thirteenth-century Latin manuscript, along with love songs, drinking songs, and a profane "gambler's mass," is a poem which begins:

> O Truth of Christ,
> O most dear rarity,
> O most rare Charity,
> Where dwell'st thou now?

The poet seeks the truth of Christ, as the writer of Job seeks for the "place of wisdom," until:

Then Love replied,
"Man, wherefore didst thou doubt?
Not where thou wast wont to find
My dwelling in the southern wind;
Not in court and not in cloister,
Not in casque nor yet in cowl,
Not in battle nor in Bull,
But on the road from Jericho
I come with a wounded man." [2]

[2] *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics,* tr. Helen Waddell (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1929).

15

The Downright Brother of Jesus

THE FAMILY AT NAZARETH WAS A LARGE ONE. WHEN JESUS spoke in the synagogue, the people were astonished and said, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?" The necessity for defending such doctrines as that of the "perpetual virginity" of Mary has given rise to the claim that Matthew meant "cousins" when he said "brothers" or that when Mary married Joseph, he was already blessed with a large family. The straightforward way seems to be to take the account as meaning what it says.

In any case the household was a large one. James, named first of the brothers of Jesus, was probably the eldest. It is likely that he followed the family trade as a carpenter. The family were not peasants. There is no reason to doubt that they held a respected position in the community and enjoyed the simple abundance of skilled working people in a Galilean town. That James had received enough education to enable him to write good colloquial Greek is evident from his letter. The straightforward, downright character of the man is clearly reflected in his writing. According to Paul "the brothers of the Lord" were married.

One thing is clear about this man James. He was quite confident that the way he saw things was the way they were, however they might appear to less hardheaded and discerning people than himself. He addresses his letter "to the twelve

tribes in the dispersion" with evident consciousness of authority. While he advises them, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God," he betrays no feeling of standing in the need of prayer for wisdom himself. We get the impression of an able, self-confident personality, with the qualities of leadership and perhaps not without a touch of arrogance.

Paul resented this assumption of authority. Although James was not one of the twelve, Paul is willing to class him with the apostles,[1] as he claimed apostleship for himself, but he refuses to yield to any of the church leaders in Jerusalem the right to tell him how to manage affairs among the mountain people of Galatia and the Greeks of the Hellenic settlements. In his letter to the Galatians he mentions "false brethren" who, as he suspects, came from James "to spy out our freedom." But, he says, "We did not yield submission even for a moment." When he went to Jerusalem, accompanied by Barnabas and Titus, it was in the interest of mutual understanding between the conservative Jewish following of James and his own more liberal group of workers among the Gentiles. But, he says, "From those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me." He repeats this word "reputed" which Moffatt makes somewhat too derogatory by translating it "so-called." Putting it into the slangy speech of our time we might imagine him saying, "I went up to see the big shots in Jerusalem but was determined not to be pushed around."

Later he mentions James, Peter, and John as "reputed to be pillars," who gave him the right hand of fellowship when they heard his report. "Only," he says, "they would have us

[1] See Gal. 1:19. The apostleship was not limited to the original twelve. Matthias was elected, Acts 1:26. Barnabas was called an apostle, Acts 14:14. See also Rom. 16:7; II Cor. 11:13; I Thess. 1:1; 2:6; Rev. 2:2.

remember the poor." Then, to make it clear that he was taking nobody's orders, he adds, "Which very thing I was eager to do." Paul was not the last preacher to be nettled by the "pillars" at ecclesiastical headquarters. Ecclesiasticism has been a peril of the Church from the beginning. The argument as to who should be the greatest among them began almost immediately after Jesus appointed his twelve apostles. For church officials to lead without arrogating to themselves unwarranted powers and to avoid the many other pitfalls of bureaucracy calls for such double portions of the graces of tact and humility as few of us possess.

One does not think of tact and humility as being among the virtues of James. He was the vigorous, extroverted type of man who "has no nonsense about him." We suspect that it was he who proposed to seize Jesus and restrain him, "for they said, 'He is beside himself.' " The word is the same word Festus used when he cried out, "Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad," as the apostle was defending himself before King Agrippa. It was probably James who offered Jesus some advice as to how a prophet should go about his business. "No man," he said, "works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." In other words advertise, get publicity—a piece of advice, as any newspaperman will testify, which some of the prophets of our time have not been slow to follow.

The counsel of such men as James may sometimes be a little crude, but it is always to be respected. Such men are affected by events rather than by ideas. James might never realize Paul's wish "that you . . . may have power to comprehend . . . what is the breadth and length and height and depth" of Christ's life and teaching. He had refused to take the mission of Jesus seriously at first, but he was shocked out of his unbelief by the things he saw happen and particularly

by the events of the last week. It may have been for this reason that it was to James alone of those who had not been of the inner circle of disciples that Jesus made a special appearance following the Crucifixion. A more subtle man than he might still have continued to reason, doubt, and speculate; but to James a fact was a fact. He believed what he had seen.

An English preacher once published a volume of "essays for the untheologically minded." There are many such people among the followers of Christ, and the epistle commonly ascribed to James might well be included in such a collection. Such people often lay great stress on the forms and definitions of theology, but they take them ready-made and ask no questions. They have the most profound respect for old, familiar phrases. They accept a creed as a man accepts a watch. Someone else made it, and it works; then keep it wound up and let it alone. Disaster will follow if you try to take it apart to see what makes it tick. These people are often found among the "pillars" of the Church. They are stable, loyal, useful people, and grandfather's religion is good enough for them.

James was such a man. It had taken a cataclysmic event to shake him out of his unbelief and convince him that the claims of Jesus were not the result of visionary aberration. Later, when he had become the leading man of the church in Jerusalem, he regarded Paul's adventurous handling of the gospel and his disregard of ancient tradition as full of danger. Yet he could not get away from facts. His "spies" brought back reports of things that were happening up there in the north. Then Paul and Barnabas came to Jerusalem and told their story. When they had finished and doubtless had answered many a searching question, "James replied, 'Brethren, listen to me.' " After quoting the prophecy of Amos and approving some remarks that Peter had made he said, "Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles

who turn to God." That settled the matter. It was one of the turning points in the history of the infant Church, and the two missionaries went back to their work among the heathen with the blessing of the "pillars" at Jerusalem.

Once a man like James becomes your friend, you may depend on him. Some years after that conference with the leaders at Jerusalem, Paul came to the city again. On his way he dispatched his great letter to the church at Rome. He was downhearted and apprehensive. The strain of his years of campaigning and his struggle with ill-health had told on him.

He was approaching sixty and beginning to think of himself as an old man.[3] Heresy hunters had been attacking him, and some of the people in the Jerusalem church were bitterly opposed to his liberal views. His friends warned him not to go, but he would not turn back. Saying his farewell to the friends from Ephesus who came to the ship to see him off, he said, "Behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there. . . . But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course." He need not have worried, for James was his friend.

"When we had come to Jerusalem," wrote Luke, "the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James; and all the elders were present." Paul told them a thrilling story of his missionary labors, and, says Luke, "When they heard it, they glorified God." But, they reminded him, there were many Jewish Christians in the city who were zealous for the preservation of the old traditions and who had been persuaded that Paul was urging

[3] Some three years later he writes of having finished his career and being "ready to be offered." In the letter to Philemon he refers to himself as "Paul the aged." The Revised Standard Version unfortunately changes this to "Paul an ambassador."

Jewish converts to forsake the laws of Moses. "Do therefore what we tell you," they said. "We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself live in observance of the law." This bit of practical expediency sounds very much like James. It was successful. Paul had no further trouble with the Jerusalem Christians. The attempt against his life and the riot which followed were incited by an anti-Christian mob, from the region of Pergamus, who thought he had brought Gentiles into the temple courts.

James is clearly characterized in the epistle which bears his name. Critics may doubt his authorship, but they find no sufficient evidence to justify a denial of it. The writer has no use for "double-minded" people who indulge themselves with doubts. He would have scorned Emerson's saying that consistency is "the hobgoblin of little minds," a thing with which great souls have nothing to do. With him religion was a solid, practical reality. Let others argue about what constitutes faith; he will judge a man's faith by what the man does. He wants no probings into the mysteries of Providence. Let a man bear his burdens and not ask too many questions. If your neighbor is hungry, give him, not pious words, but good red meat. If he works for you, pay him decent wages. If his need is beyond your power, then pray to God, for the validity of prayer has been proven by experience. "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects."

One can imagine a discussion going on among those early Christians as to what religion really is. It is a question that still occasions debate among philosophers and theologians. James listens until he has had enough and brings the matter down to solid ground. "I'll tell you what religion is," he says.

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." Do right by your neighbor and keep yourself clean, and you'll have no need to addle your brains with questions for which every wise man has a different answer.

Paul contended passionately for the principle of justification by faith alone. James held that there was neither measure nor evidence of a man's faith apart from his deeds. Characteristically he reduces the discussion instantly to factual, concrete terms. "You say you have faith," he says. "Let's see it. You say you believe in God. Who doesn't? Even the demons believe—and shudder. You talk foolishly. As the body is dead apart from the spirit, so faith apart from works is dead." [4] Martin Luther thought Paul was right and therefore James was wrong, and called the letter of James "an epistle of straw." Most of us would not agree with him, nor would we lose from the New Testament the tonic quality of James's message.

Paul was by nature and training a theologian. James was a pragmatical man, impatient of finespun theories, thinking of religion as a practical utility in the rough-and-tumble business of daily living. Paul, although he had been taught a trade and made his living by it through most of his career, was incurably a scholar. James was a hardheaded man with a dominating personality and a talent for administration. On such men we depend when we want to build churches and raise the money to keep them going.

We do not choose between the two. We know that two such men, far differing in temperament, might build between them a strong, enduring friendship, but that they would never understand each other. And we know that despite all seeming contradictions both were right.

[4] See Jas. 2:14-26.

16

Defenders of the Faith

THE PHARISEE STOOD AND PRAYED THUS WITH HIMSELF"—AND about himself. "God," he said, "I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector."

Well, why not? He was, in fact, a good man. There was no reason why he should not be thankful that he was a respectable, pious Jew, in good standing with society. Certainly it is a blessing to have lived a decent life, and we should all be thankful for our blessings.

The trouble was that the man's goodness had gone sour, as the goodness of many a saint has done. When the writer of Ecclesiastes, two centuries before the time of Christ, said, "Be not righteous overmuch," he may have been thinking of the Pharisees, whose history illustrates the harm that good men may do when their saintliness is not kept sweet by a large admixture of humanity.

"The wicked are wicked, no doubt," wrote Thackeray in *The Newcomes*, ". . . but who can tell the mischief which the very virtuous do?" The Pharisees were good men, but they were betrayed by an excess of conventional and conscious virtue. In the time of transition and apostasy they did Israel an immeasurable service. They stood against the pagan fashions that were corrupting Jewish life and fought to preserve the ancient faith. They guarded the Scriptures and were the chief influence in the planting of the synagogue wherever

Jews were settled throughout the Roman Empire. The temple, with its aristocratic priesthood, was controlled by a Sadducean hierarchy. The synagogue, which was the church of the common people, was the particular care of the Pharisees.

From their simple agricultural past the Jews had begun to turn away from the fields and to become merchants and men of business instead of farmers and shepherds. As they became prosperous in their pagan environment, there was a tendency among them to assume Greek manners, wear Greek dress, and even to adopt Greek names. Wealth was pouring into the Roman empire, and many were getting rich and spending their money in ostentatious display. It was with these money-getting Jews in mind that Jesus repeatedly warned his hearers against the seductions of wealth, and it was for this cause that James wrote bitterly ironic words about the rich. Young Jews were fascinated by the games and pastimes of the Greeks and frequented the gymnasiums and theaters. Roman arms had conquered the Greeks, but Greek culture had charmed the Romans; and while the Western world was ruled by Roman law and politics, Greek art and literature were supreme. The teachings of the great Jewish philosopher Philo were a mixture of Moses and the prophets with the idealism of Plato and the mysticism of the Stoics.

Against all these tendencies, not unlike those operating among American Jews today, the Pharisee was fanatically hostile. He hated and feared all the "modernism" of his time, as the orthodox Jew hates and fears it now. Many patriotic Jews, like many of the promoters of the Zionist movement today, were inclined to regard the faith of Israel as a nationalistic rather than a religious concern. The Pharisee was intensely nationalistic, but he insisted on the meticulous observance by the individual of the religious ritual. He exalted, expounded, and preserved the sacred books, maintained the

hope of the future life, and promoted the religious training of the young. To keep the people reminded of the sacred nature of the home he introduced the "mezuzah," or doorpost symbol, which devout Jews still hang inside their doors as a sign that the home is in the keeping of God.

Opposed to the aristocratic Sadducees the Pharisees were the party of the common people. During the time of Israel's independence they brought about the separation of the high priesthood from the kingship and did all that was ever done to maintain the rights of the people against the ambitions of the aristocratic hierarchy. Josephus says that they won favor with the women because of their efforts to relax the restrictions under which women suffered. The Pharisee's question to Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" reflects their interest in the rights of women as well as their hope that they might "catch him in his words."

There had been times when the Pharisees like the Quakers had been ridiculed, like the Methodists expelled, and like the early followers of Jesus persecuted even unto death; but long before the time of Christ they had become popular and powerful. Josephus wrote:

> The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances which are not written in the law of Moses, and for that reason the Sadducees reject them, . . . and it is concerning these things that great disputes have arisen amongst them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich and have not the allegiance of the people, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side.

Like the Puritans of England, the Pharisees fought to get religion out of politics and opposed the union of organized religion with the state. The easygoing, well-fed, worldly parsons portrayed by Trollope in his tales of the cathedral town

Barchester, and who are today by no means extinct in the Christian Church, are the Sadducees of modern times. The censorious, self-disciplining, ultrapious Puritans were like the Pharisees. And as the Puritans, with all their excesses, are said to have saved England, so the Pharisees may be said to have saved Israel.

When Jesus warned his hearers against "the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy," he referred to the peculiar temptation of anyone who sets himself up to be a defender of faith. "You tithe mint and rue and every herb," said Jesus, "and neglect justice and the love of God." In the mind of the zealot, creed and ritual become more important than conduct. What he professes to believe may be of more concern than what he does, and his relation to a sect or party may be of more moment than his relation to his fellow man. No man needs more to search his soul for the sin of hypocrisy than the one who conceives himself to be a favored servant of God.

As with the Puritans, there were many men of mild and generous temper among the Pharisees. The relations between some of them and Jesus were friendly. It was a gentle reproof that Jesus offered to Simon the Pharisee, who had extended to him the hospitality of his home. Nicodemus defended Jesus sincerely, if not too courageously, and joined with another Pharisee in giving him honorable burial. The famous Pharisee Hillel, one of the founders of Talmudic Judaism, was an unusually broad-minded man for his time. His grandson was the great Gamaliel, the teacher of Paul. We meet with him in the book of Acts as he urges tolerance for the upstart "Christian" faith. Give it time, he said, and if it is not of God, it will come to nothing as many another heresy has done; but if it is of God, nothing you can do will conquer it. He encouraged his students to study the literature of the Greeks

and advocated more friendly relations between Jews and Gentiles. It was by the teaching of this Pharisee that Paul's mind was prepared for the experience that changed him from the persecutor, "breathing threats and murder," to the apostle who wrote, "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

Pharisaism grew up amid the conditions that followed the conquests of Alexander. The cruel excesses of Antiochus Epiphanes solidified the movement and drew it to the more intensely patriotic and pious Jews. By the beginning of the century before Christ it had become a powerful party, fanatically zealous for traditional Judaism and hostile to all foreign influence. When Jesus told men who had been brought up on stories of the suffering, oppression, and murder of their forefathers to forgive their enemies and to pray for those who held them in a hated bondage, they were outraged at such teaching from a Jew. In the light of recent history it is not hard to understand the feeling of the Pharisee. Such a psalm as the 137th, with its beautiful expression of homesick despair, its jeering voices of inhuman enemies, and its terrible ending, "Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones," might have been written by a poet of a Polish town where unbelievable cruelties were visited on the helpless, or by a Greek from a mountain village where scores of women and children were deliberately burned to death in the schoolhouse in which they had taken refuge. It is hard enough for us who have never suffered from such horrible brutalities as were visited on millions during World War II to hold a "Christian" attitude toward any people who participated or acquiesced in them. It may well be impossible for some of those who were their victims.

The Pharisee's fault was that into which professed defend-

ers of the faith so often fall. He identified his opinions with truth, and himself with good. Wherein other men differed from him, they must be wrong; and wherein their actions met his disapproval, they must be evil. He substituted orthodoxy for ethics and put a theological system before the simple faith that requires first of all that a man shall do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before his God. He remembered one commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," but forgot the other, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Like all those whose habitual attitude is disapproval of others he satisfied his need to admire something by admiring himself.

The Pharisee was a good man. There was no reason why he should not have thanked God that he was not a thief nor an adulterer, nor even like the publican, beating on his breast and crying for forgiveness. But good men often become persuaded that their cause is the cause of God, that their opinions are the word of God, and that what they want is the will of God. The snare into which the Pharisee fell was the one that is set for the feet of the saints at the door of every church. The only people who escape it altogether are those who do not know that they are good.

17

The Wisehearted Women

In the account of the making of the tent of the tabernacle in the time of Moses we read, "All the women that were wise hearted did spin with their hands. . . . And all the women whose heart stirred them up in wisdom spun goat's hair." [1] The furnishing of the interior of the place of worship, with its veil of scarlet and embroidery, was also largely women's work.

From the time of Moses to our own day, when women's sewing circles meet in thousands of churches, the wisehearted women have been at work.

Not all the women of the Bible are wisehearted. Isaiah pays his respects to "the daughters of Zion" who trip with mincing steps along the city streets, holding their heads high, ogling with their eyes, and flaunting their finery—anklets, necklaces, earrings, scent bottles, robes, and purses. Such women are always with us. In Massachusetts in the seventeenth century the Rev. Nathaniel Ward professed that he liked to see women well dressed, but he added:

> I truly confess it is beyond the ken of my understanding to conceive how these women should have any true grace or valuable virtue as to disfigure themselves with such exotic garbs. . . . It is no marvel that they wear drails on the hinder part of their heads, having nothing, it seems, in the forepart but a few squirrels' brains to help them frisk from one ill-favored fashion to another.

[1] The Hebrew word rendered "wise hearted" has no English equivalent. It is a compound signifying a combination of wisdom and skill.

Always with us is the flibbertigibbet, and always with us is the wisehearted woman. The story of Jesus begins with his mother, Mary, who "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart." The first convert Paul made in Europe was a wisehearted woman Lydia, in whose home the church at Philippi had its beginning. Almost the last of the New Testament epistles is addressed to "the elect lady," whose identity we do not know. From beginning to end, wherever we go in the history of the Christian Church, we meet with wisehearted women.

There were great women in Old Testament times. Miriam, Huldah, and Deborah were prophetesses. Jezebel was not a nice woman, but she certainly was an able one, and she seems not to have suffered from any repressions because of her sex. Nor did her daughter Athaliah, who, like her mother, came to a gruesome end. Abigail is one of the most wisehearted of all the women of the Bible. When David was rattling his sword and muttering vengeance on her husband, it was her calm voice that prevented him from yielding to his rage and doing a deed that he would always have regretted. Abigail was not the only wisehearted woman who has made the mistake of marrying a fool, or who has prevented a wise man from making a fool of himself.

According to Luke, as Jesus went through the country around Capernaum preaching in the towns and villages, he was accompanied by the twelve apostles and a group of women, "who provided for them out of their means." In the account of the Crucifixion we read of a group of women who "stood at a distance and saw these things" while Jesus was dying on the cross. Among them Matthew and Mark identify Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, and Salome. According to John four women were "standing by the cross"—the mother of

Jesus and her sister, "Mary the wife of Clopas," [2] and Mary Magdalene. Luke tells us that there was "a great multitude of the people and of women who bewailed and lamented him." Strangely the only man among his followers mentioned as being present is "the disciple whom he loved," presumably John. Someone has celebrated the constancy of these women in verse.

> Not she with trait'rous kiss her Saviour stung,
> Not she denied him with unholy tongue;
> She, while apostles shrank, could danger brave,
> Last at his cross, and earliest at his grave.

Paul's ministry owed much to the labors of devoted women, and though he held to old-fashioned ideas on their subordination to men, he was never backward in acknowledging his debt to them. When he and Silas spent three weeks in Thessalonica, "not a few of the leading women" were among his converts. When his enemies incited a riot and he was obliged to move on to Berea, many responded to his preaching, "with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men."

It was to a group of devout women that the gospel was first preached in Europe. When Paul, with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, sailed from Troas on his European adventure, he landed at Neapolis, where the ships of Brutus and Cassius were anchored during the battle in which Antony and Octavius were victorious and the Roman republic perished. From there Paul's party walked the ten miles over the mountain road to the city of Philippi. Not many Jews were there, and there was no synagogue; but a group of women met for prayer by the

[2] Salome may have been "the mother of the sons of Zebedee," James and John. It is usually assumed that "Mary . . . of Clopas" was the wife of Clopas, but the word "wife" does not appear in the Greek text, and she may have been his daughter.

river outside the city. There Paul went with his little party on the Sabbath day.

"We sat down and spoke to the women who had come together," writes Luke. "One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul." Thus began the history of the Christian Church in Europe, in a little group of women meeting for prayer by the river which had separated the camps of the two Roman armies some three quarters of a century before and on or very near the ground on which the famous battle of Philippi had been fought.

During their stay in Philippi, Paul's party were guests at Lydia's home. She seems to have been a woman of wealth, which may account for the fact that Paul received financial help again and again from the church at Philippi while he refused to accept it from other churches. We may think of Lydia as the kind of able, intelligent, independent woman to be found conducting a prosperous business in the shopping center of any American city. Scholars touched with the spirit of romance, such as Ernest Renan, have suggested that she may have become Paul's wife, but there is not the slightest evidence to support such a notion.

Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, was another woman of whom Paul thought highly. She is believed to have been a Roman woman of good family connections, married to a Jew. Aquila was a manufacturer of tents, and when Paul, somewhat disheartened, went from Athens to Corinth, he sought out this couple, probably in the hope of getting a job. "He went to see them," says Luke, ". . . because he was of the same trade." So began one of the great friendships of the apostle's life. When later he went to Ephesus, they accompanied him, and we meet

them yet again in the list of greetings at the end of the letter to the Roman church. "Greet Prisca[3] and Aquila," he says, "my fellow workers who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks." We do not know what the danger was from which this devoted couple saved the apostle. The famous German scholar Harnack believed that Priscilla, perhaps jointly with her husband, was the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The prejudice against the prominence of women in the post-apostolic church, he thought, might be the reason why no early tradition of its authorship was preserved and why the epistle was not finally recognized as a part of the New Testament until the third Council of Carthage in the year 397. However that may be, Priscilla must have been a person of influence and power in the apostolic church.

The mother of John Mark, who wrote the earliest of the four Gospels, was Mary, a leader in the apostolic church. It was to her house that Peter went when he was released from jail on the last of the several occasions when he was arrested in Jerusalem. When he knocked at the outer gate, the maid Rhoda was so excited when she recognized his voice that she rushed back into the house, where "many were gathered together and were praying," and left him standing there, still knocking. One can imagine him, when he finally got in, telling his adventures to the company while young John Mark listened and was stirred with a desire to have a part in the missionary enterprise. It was from here that he joined Paul and Barnabas when they returned to Antioch from their visit to Jerusalem. We meet with a Mary among those greeted at the close of the letter to the Romans, and it is supposed that when Mark became the companion and helper of Peter and their work took them to Rome, his mother set herself up there.

[3] The proper name is Prisca. Priscilla is a diminutive.

According to ancient historians Corinth was a giant standing astride the narrow neck of land between two seas, "with one foot in the Aegean and the other in the Gulf of Corinth." On the Aegean side was the harbor town of Cenchreae, seven miles from the great city. There during Paul's stay in Corinth a church was established, and one of its officers was a wise-hearted woman named Phoebe. "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess in the church at Cenchreae," wrote Paul, "that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require of you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well."

"Helper" is an inadequate translation of the Greek word *prostatis*, which occurs only here in the New Testament and must have been chosen particularly to describe this woman. The word means literally a "before-stander," or sponsor. A foreigner might be obliged to secure a citizen as his *prostatis*, as an alien during wartime might be permitted to settle in this country only when a citizen of repute and financial ability makes himself responsible for him. The backing of such people as Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue at Corinth, and Erastus, the city treasurer, may well have been the human means by which Paul was enabled to continue his work in the city for a year and a half in spite of opposition and abuse. So the support of leading women like Lydia, in Philippi, and Phoebe, in Cenchreae, must have been of great assistance to the early itinerant preachers of the new faith. It is believed that when Phoebe journeyed to Rome, she carried with her Paul's great epistle to the Christians of that city. Renan remarked that when this woman set out from Cenchreae, she carried folded in her gown the theology of the Christian Church.

It is evident that the pioneer churches of the Christian faith owed as much to the devotion of women as do the churches of

today. Apart from the "many" who followed Jesus from Galilee and ministered to his needs, and the groups mentioned in Acts, we read of more than fifty women in the New Testament, at least thirty of whom are identified by name or otherwise. The fame attained by individual women in the early Church is indicated by the story of the beautiful young girl Thekla, which was probably composed late in the first century and of which there were many later versions. According to the tale, when Paul was traveling from Pisidian Antioch to Lystra, he was met by Onesiphorus, who persuaded him to turn aside to Iconium. Thekla was the daughter of a noble family, and as she sat by her window, she could hear the apostle preaching in the house of Onesiphorus, where he was staying. So intent was she on listening to the words of Paul that she refused to stir from the window, even to take food. She became a believer, and despite the efforts of her family and of her betrothed lover to dissuade her she resolved to devote her life to the service of Christ. The story tells of her adventures, her endurance of persecution, her exposure to wild beasts, and the miracles by which she was repeatedly saved from death. Thekla, like Pomponia Graecina, the wife of the general Aulus Plautius, who completed the conquest of southeast Britain in the year A.D. 43, and Domitilla, who was banished by her uncle the emperor Domitian, was probably a lady of noble birth, whose piety and evangelistic labors became a tradition early in the history of the Church. Her story was quoted by Christian writers as an argument for the right of women to preach and baptize in the name of Christ.

The list of wisehearted women in the early Church is long. Considering it one understands the exclamation of the great pagan sophist Libanius when he met the mother of his famous pupil Chrysostom, "What women these Christians have!"

18

The Downtrodden Sex

HERE AND THERE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WE ARE REMINDED of the difficulty with which the most enlightened men shake off the prejudices that were instilled in them in childhood. There is no better example of this than the teaching of Paul and Peter in regard to women.

There is an old Jewish prayer, "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a woman." The idea that to be a woman was a misfortune and that women were created to be the servants of men was a part of his bringing-up from which Paul never quite freed himself. He fought all through his career for the equality of all people in the sight of God, yet the rabbinical tradition of the subservience of women crops out in his letters again and again.

Thus Paul writes, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness." "If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home." Perhaps it is right that a woman should play second fiddle to her husband, but the reason Paul gives for keeping her in her place is hardly convincing to a modern mind. "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men," he says, ". . . for Adam was formed first, then Eve." Eve might reply that if God's creatures were to have authority in the order of their creation, as recorded in the book of Genesis, we human beings would be at the bottom of the list, and the fishes would rule the world.

The nations surrounding Israel were well supplied with female divinities, but there were none among the Jews. In sentimental Christian art the angel is likely to be a lady, but in Jewish literature, including the Bible, the heavenly messenger always appears in the guise of a man. Women were excluded from the more sacred parts of the temple, and we remember that on one occasion the disciples of Jesus were astounded to find him, a rabbi, or teacher, condescending to talk with a woman. "They marveled," says John, "that he was talking with a woman."

That the subordinate position of women in Western civilization has been largely due to the avidity with which men interpreted the New Testament teaching to justify their assumption of superiority can hardly be doubted. Many women have been among those whom the Church designated as "the chosen followers of God," but neither in the canon law of the Church nor in the civil law of Christian lands have women ever stood on an equality with men.

In the seventeenth century George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, recorded in his diary that he had been arguing with people, presumably Christians, who held that women had no souls. "I reproved them," he says, "for Mary said, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord.' " Justice Kent in his *Commentaries on American Law* said, "The preeminence of the Christian nations . . . is strikingly displayed in the equality and dignity which their institutions confer upon the female character." At the time when he was writing this there were laws in effect in free America based on the assumption that a woman was not legally a person. Such laws have not yet disappeared from our books. Some deprive a woman of rights possessed by men, and others confer on her privileges and protections evidently arising from the belief that she is to be classed with idiots or infants.

While Paul availed himself of the help of women and paid high tribute to their devotion and ability, he was plainly worried lest they should go too far in breaking through the old restrictions. We find most of his cautions against feminist tendencies in the Church in the letters to Corinth and to Timothy. Corinth was the commercial center of Greece, and Timothy had a Greek upbringing. A liberal attitude toward women was a Greek characteristic. Thus Luke, the Greek doctor, in his Gospel and the book of Acts delights in telling of the women who followed Christ and of those who played a leading part in the founding of the Church.

When the people at Corinth wrote to Paul for his ruling on differences that had arisen among them concerning the status of women, he began his answer by disclaiming any divine directive for his views. Later he says, "Now concerning the unmarried [women], I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion." His confessedly uninspired opinions on these matters are generally disregarded by Christians in these times, but they served for centuries as arguments against including women among those who, in the language of our American forefathers, "are created equal; . . . they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

In New Testament times Greek ideas were influencing Roman thought, and women were gaining more independence. Marriage, for instance, was coming to be regarded as it was defined a century later as "the union of man and woman in complete community of life and joint participation in divine and human law." When the Church assumed ascendancy, the freedom of the gospel began to give way to the authority imposed by the hierarchical system, and by the end of the fourth century the position of women was less favorable than it had been under Roman law during the eighty years from the beginning of the second century to the death of Marcus Aurelius.

Paul's teaching concerning the relation of the sexes is a mixture of the rabbinical tradition with his own conviction that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." He regards the unmarried state as the more conducive to piety, making a "concession" [1] only to those who are distracted with sexual urgencies. "The unmarried man," he says, "is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, . . . but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife." One may accept Bacon's dictum that a man with wife and children "hath given hostages to fortune," but most of us who have had opportunity for observation would be inclined to doubt the superior devotion of bachelors to the things of the spirit.

"I want you to understand," writes Paul, "that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband." He urges Timothy to be guided by the faith of his mother and grandmother, but he says, "The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinated, even as the law says."

The position of women in Christian civilization has been greatly influenced by these views of Paul, in which there is much of the tradition of the rabbis and nothing of the teaching of Christ. Some of our Puritan forefathers thought it a pious duty to look upon a woman as a combination of frailty and guile. John Milton said the woman was made of man's rib, and a rib was naturally crooked. Over the fall of Adam he sang his ludicrous lament:

[1] "I say this by way of concession, not of command." The Greek word implies understanding sympathy. Paul was no natural ascetic. He had "buffeted" his own body and "subdued" it.

> Oh, why did God,
> Creator wise, that peopled highest Heaven
> With Spirits masculine, create at last
> This novelty on Earth,—this fair defect
> Of Nature, and not fill the World at once
> With men as Angels, without feminine;
> Or find some other way to generate
> Mankind? This mischief had not then befallen,
> And more that shall befall—innumerable
> Disturbances on Earth through female snares.[2]

Old Matthew Henry, whose commentaries on the Bible were a very present help in time of trouble to two generations of preachers, had other views: He said:

> The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.[3]

Among even the most conservative of Christians the counsels of Paul concerning women are rejected. Women take audible part in the worship of the churches, joining in hymns, responses, and prayers. Certainly the soprano soloist, gallantly striving for an uncertain high B-flat, cannot be said to be keeping silent in the church. As to his saying that he permits no woman to teach, our Sunday schools would be thin affairs if they had only the men to depend upon. Though the apostle permitted no woman to have authority over men, the largest of the Presbyterian bodies, traditionally conservative in its theology and government, now permits the ordination of women as "ruling elders," to whom the members of the congregation, both men and women, must promise "obedience in

[2] From *Paradise Lost,* Bk. 10, ll. 888-97.

[3] *Commentary,* Gen. 2:22-23. The idea appears in the writings of several authors previous to Henry's time.

the Lord." An attempt to amend the rule restricting the preaching office to men in this denomination recently failed, but there can be little doubt that before another generation shall have passed the pulpits of most Protestant churches will be open to women. Whether one regards these changes favorably or not, the fact that they involve deliberate repudiation of apostolic authority can be evaded only by the kind of shifty reasoning too often resorted to by Christian apologists.

With all our progress away from rabbinical restrictions, one ancient rule is still enforced in large sections of the Church. It is the rule that women must keep their heads covered in the sanctuary. They may borrow a man's hat or his handkerchief, but cover their heads they must, even if no service is in progress and they are merely admiring the architecture or scrubbing the floor. The passage in Paul's writings on which this absurdity is based is full of exegetical difficulties, and no one knows precisely what the apostle meant by it. According to ancient Semitic custom both men and women were obliged to cover their heads when they approached the divine. This rule is still enforced among Jews and Mohammedans. Paul seems to have abandoned it for the Greek custom of worshiping with uncovered heads in the case of men, but to have maintained it in regard to women.

Peter and Paul may have held differing views as to some details of Christian teaching, but they were agreed as to the subservience of women. Peter classes wives with servants. "Servants, be submissive to your masters . . . ," he says, "not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing. . . . Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands . . . as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord."

Despite apostolic conservatism women of the early Church, such as Lydia, Phoebe, and Priscilla, seem to have had more freedom and greater influence than they were allowed in later

times. Though there were deaconesses in the Church of the fourth century, their duties were limited to services of the humblest and most servile kind. Epiphanius, bishop of Constantia, said that even Mary the mother of our Lord, highly favored as she was, never performed any solemn service in the Church, nor had any other woman done so "from the foundation of the world." Opposed to this view was Chrysostom's belief that there may have been women in the apostolic church honored with the rank of apostle. Tertullian rises to wrathy eloquence as he exhorts women to be mindful of their low estate. "Do you not know," he says, "that you are each an Eve? . . . You are the first forsaker of the divine law, you destroyed God's image, man. On account of the death you merited even the Son of God had to die." The vehemence of Paul and the later leaders on this matter suggests that there was rebellion among the women of the Church against repressive discrimination.

Charles Loring Brace in his famous book *Gesta Christi*, discussing the benefits conferred on women by Christianity, says that under Roman law in the time of Christ when a woman married, "all her property became that of her husband; all her earnings were his. Like children and slaves, she was not, while *in manu*, a person in her own right." He might have said precisely the same thing of the women of recent times in Christian lands. By the common law of England whatever rights a woman possessed were cancelled when she married. According to Blackstone, "The very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage." Until the passing of the Married Woman's Property Act in 1870 an English husband, even a loafer and a drunkard, might seize the earnings of his wife for the gratification of his appetite. In *The Husband's Authority Unveiled*, published in 1650, the saintly Richard Baxter discussed the question "whether it be fit or lawful for a good

man to beat his bad wife." Wives must not, he said, "disdain a little scratch on their body, or to be deplum'd of a little Pride by their discreet and conscientious Husband for their good."

It has been said that the two great forces which have operated against human brotherhood were the unequal position of women and the possession of slaves. It was not until the nineteenth century that the buying and selling of human beings ceased to be a legitimate business in Christian lands. Now in the twentieth century we are making rapid progress toward that equality of the sexes which was in the minds of advanced Romans in the second century, a period declared by Gibbon to have been the time in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous.[4]

Although the ancient taboos still stand in the way of any able and ambitious woman, we are beginning to act on the belief that women are no more and no less than people entitled to the same freedoms and subject to the same obligations as men. Some of us may regret the passing of that chivalrous gallantry and sentimental etiquette which was a mixture of solicitude and condescension extended by our fathers to the "weaker sex." We cannot, however, regret the passing of that view of woman's place as expressed by the Rev. J. N. Danforth in 1844. "Home," he said, "is the palace of the husband and father. He is the monarch of that little empire, wearing a crown that is the gift of heaven, swaying a sceptre put into his hands by the Father of all, fearing no rival and dreading no usurper." The popular and pious literature of a century ago was full of such trash.

We honor the memory of the Lydias, the Tabithas, and the Phoebes of apostolic days who played a heroic part in the

[4] *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Chap. III.

carrying of the gospel through "Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." They worked, as Paul says, "side by side" with the great pioneers of the Christian faith. A generation before them were the women, such as Mary, Joanna, and Susanna, "and many others," who, as Luke tells us, had followed Christ and his little band of workers and "provided for them out of their means." A generation after them Christian women suffered persecution and death with courage unsurpassed by the bravest men. In no generation since have such women been wanting, despite the scant and reluctant measure with which Christian institutions have conferred "equality and dignity upon the female character."

And we honor the memory of the heroine in hoop skirts of the nineteenth century who rose above the restrictions imposed upon her and prepared the way for the woman of today who works side by side with men in the causes which make for a better way of life, who is capable of standing on her own two feet, who can cross the street without leaning on a masculine arm, who can earn her own living in the world of business and give the men some hustling to do to keep up with her.

19

A Bundle of Old Letters

LETTER WRITING IS AN ANCIENT ART, HOW ANCIENT WE DO NOT know. In 1888 a peasant woman, poking about in the ruins near the village of Tell el 'Amarna, on the Nile, was looking for bits of ancient pottery to sell to tourists. She found some tablets on which were marks she thought might be some ancient form of writing. Thus were discovered the famous Tell el 'Amarna tablets, more than three hundred documents, mostly letters written in the Babylonian language in the fifteenth century before Christ. Some have to do with negotiations for the marriages of princely ladies, some concern diplomatic alliances, and some are reports from commanding officers at Egyptian strongholds calling for prompt assistance lest the Hittites or some other foe swoop down upon them. Six of them were written by the governor of Jerusalem and are filled with complaints against some of his neighbors who were dealing with the Amorites.

It is probable that in the ancient rubbish heaps of the East there are thousands of documents still waiting for scholars to discover and decipher. Those which have already been found include about the same variety as one would expect to find in some old attic in our time, bills, laundry lists, reports, and letters from absent sons to their mothers and from lovers to their ladies. Such a little note as this from a young fellow in the army might have been written by an American boy soldiering in the South Pacific: "Dear Bylba, I have been ordered up the Euphrates with my regiment. I shall return in April, and

then we shall be married. April is a good month for a wedding." We hope he came back and found her constant and that they lived happily ever afterward.

The earliest letter of the Bible is the treacherous note that David wrote to Joab. "And it came to pass . . . that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah . . . , saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die." It was written some time before 1000 B.C. Curiously the earliest letter that appears in Greek literature dates at about the same time and was written for the same purpose, to secure the death of the man who carried it. According to the sixth book of the Iliad, Anteia, wife of King Proitos, made advances to the handsome youth Bellerophon, as Potiphar's wife sought to snare Joseph, and met with the same rebuff. She prevailed on Proitos to send Bellerophon to her father, the king of Lycia, with a letter "containing many deadly things." He was to "show this to Anteia's father that he might be slain." But Bellerophon was more fortunate than Uriah. The scheme went wrong, and he lived to marry a princess.

Nearly half of the New Testament is composed of letters. It is hardly more likely that their writers expected us to be reading them in the twentieth century than that the young soldier expected us to read his little note to the beloved Bylba. Of these twenty-one New Testament letters thirteen are commonly ascribed to Paul.[1] They were not written amid the tranquillity of a scholar's study, but in the heat and hurry of laborious missionary campaigns, or while the apostle was impatiently waiting to be released from jail. Paul wrote, not be-

[1] In the Catholic Church the Epistle to the Hebrews is also ascribed to Paul, though held by non-Catholics, generally, to be of other authorship.

cause he was moved to literary composition, but because, as he expressed it, he had "the care of all the churches" on his mind, and conditions had arisen which demanded his attention. Sometimes he felt so strongly, as he wrote to his erring converts, that grammar gave way to emphasis, and his Greek gets into something of a snarl. One is reminded of the reply of Henry Ward Beecher to a youth who pointed out certain grammatical lapses in a sermon. "Young man," said Beecher, "when the English language gets in my way, it doesn't stand a chance."

Those who received these letters did not always realize their value, and some of them were lost or destroyed. How many Paul wrote, we do not know, but he must have written many more, during the twenty years of his missionary labors, than those that have come down to us. From references in the Corinthian epistles it has been inferred that he wrote at least five letters to that church.[2] Sometimes he wrote with more than one group of converts in mind. He directed that the First Epistle to the Thessalonians should be read "to all the brethren." At the close of Colossians he says, "When this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea." This Laodicean letter has been lost, unless as some have thought, it is the one we know as the Epistle to the Ephesians. At the close of the second letter to Thessalonica he says, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark of every letter of mine; it is the way I write." We may infer from this that his correspondence with the church at Thessalonica was not limited to the two epistles which appear in the New Testament.

[2] See I Cor. 5:9; II Cor. 2:4; 7:8. The last four chapters of II Cor. may have been a separate letter, written before the first nine.

While some of these writings are more like treatises than letters, they all contain local and personal allusions. He begins his first letter to Corinth with an expression of his anxious concern that the people conduct themselves in a manner befitting Christians. "It has been reported to me," he says, ". . . that there is quarreling among you." He has heard that some of the saints have been guilty of conduct of which a decent pagan would be ashamed. In the seventh chapter he takes up a series of questions which they have sent him, concerning the status of women, marriage, the eating of certain foods, the problems arising from social and business contacts with pagan people, the relative importance of different functions in the church organizations, and the ecstatic utterances called "speaking with tongues." Some years ago when we were receiving hundreds of letters asking questions to be answered by radio, it appeared that the people of today are interested in the same kind of problems and arguments that crop out again and again in these New Testament letters.

There are many personal references. Paul mentions by name about eighty living persons. Phoebe, the deaconess, is in Rome, probably on legal business, and he asks friends there to extend hospitality to her. Epaphroditus has been sick and near to death. He wants to see Zenas the lawyer.[3] Crescens has gone to Galatia. Tychicus is now in Ephesus and will tell Timothy "all about my affairs." Trophimus has been ill at Miletus. Occasionally Paul shows solicitude for some of his converts who have been slipping. "Say to Archippus," he says, " 'See that you fulfill the ministry which you have received in the Lord.' " When Timothy comes to Rome, he is to bring John Mark

[3] Possibly about matters connected with Paul's father's estate. The family must have been well-to-do, and in his later years the apostle appears not to have been without resources.

with him, and he is to stop at the house of Carpus in Troas to fetch a cloak and some books that were left there. It is hardly probable that all these personal matters would have been put into these letters had the writer thought that he was writing what people would be reading for centuries to come.

From the hundreds of letters left by the Roman lawyer and orator Marcus Tullius Cicero, who died about forty years before the birth of Jesus, we have learned most of what we know concerning the daily lives of the Romans of his time. It is by no means beyond possibility that hitherto unknown records and letters from the apostolic circle may be discovered by those who delve in the ancient rubbish heaps, or that manuscripts of the New Testament earlier in origin than any we now possess may come to light.

There is a kind of promissory note inserted into the middle of one of Paul's letters. It was written to his friend Philemon, a resident of Colosse. Among all the letters that have come down to our time from the past there is none more charming than this. It appears that a slave, named Onesimus, had stolen money from his master and run away. Naturally he would make for the big city. The money spent he finds his way to Paul, who is a political prisoner allowed to live "in his own hired house" and to receive visitors. Paul is anxious lest subversive teaching turn the Christians of Colosse from the faith he has taught them, and he writes to urge them to continue "as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God." So he sends his faithful helper Tychicus with the letter called the Epistle to the Colossians and takes the opportunity to send the runaway slave back with him. The letter to Philemon is an appeal from the apostle for mercy to the slave.

This letter to Philemon is full of the tenderness of friendship and the kindness of a great man toward "one of the least of these, my brethren." He has, he says, come to love Onesimus

and should have been glad to keep him, "that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment," but he deems it right that the runaway should go back and face the master he has wronged. It is here that he inserts his promise to make up the defalcation of Onesimus. "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything," he says, "charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand, I will repay it." This promise in writing, signed with his name, was more than a friendly assurance. It probably constituted a legal obligation.[4]

Nothing in Paul's writings gives us so revealing a look into his heart as does this little letter, nor does anything so reveal how he looked into the hearts of others. With less than five hundred words he gives us a clear glimpse of the social conditions of the time, he conveys a picture of a wealthy and magnanimous Colossian gentleman, and he shows himself as a man of tact, kindness, and courtesy. Philemon would have to be a more hardhearted man than he probably was to resist the appeal of his old friend. We are sure that he forgave his errant slave, and we hope that he sent him back to Paul "to serve [him] on [his] behalf," as Paul had so delicately hinted that he might do.

All the elements of our common life are in these letters. Their greatness will be more apparent to us if we read them as we might read a bundle of old letters written by our great-grandfather, taking the author as meaning what he says and not investing his words with sectarian preconceptions. They tell us of the quarrels, the lawsuits, the broken friendships that are so common in life. They reflect the crankiness of human

[4] According to the personal property law of New York State a promise to answer for the "debt, default, or miscarriage of another person" is legally binding if "it or some note or memorandum thereof be in writing and subscribed by the party to be charged therewith."

nature, the greed and ignorance and bigotry of men, and they are full of the "milk of human kindness," the love of friend for friend, and all the interests that are being carried to our doors today by our friend the postman. The ingredients of life are all here, its temptations, its weariness, its puzzles, and its hope. We talk about the changes that take place in the world, but the things for which men work and hope and fight, and live and die, are the same with us as they were with Onesimus and Tychicus and Philemon and all the rest of the people we meet in the New Testament.

All the knowledge we have gained and all the gadgets we have invented have made little difference in the problems that vex and the temptations that destroy. Euodia and Syntyche quarrel; Timothy falters in his ministry; Demas yields to the pleasures of the world; Onesimus betrays his trust and robs his master. The pursuit of riches, the cares of this world, and the lusts of the flesh still crush the living Word within us. If Paul were doing his work here in our own day, "the care of all the churches" of which he writes to the people at Corinth would be much the same as it was nineteen centuries ago. Life goes on through the ages, always seeming to change, but always remaining essentially the same, like the river that rises in the quiet hills, flows in its prime through busy scenes and thronging cities, and at last loses itself in the sea. So life flows on, and underneath it all is the eternal reality about which some of us talk so much and know so little.

Here they are—a bundle of old letters, full of the faith and hope and wisdom of the ages. Let us open them and read them, remembering that they were written by real people to living men and women, who like ourselves were trying to find their way through a troubled and confusing world. We have learned much and made a thousand inventions to help us to be

comfortable, but the things which destroy us and the things which save us are the same as they were on the day when the young Tertius sat with pen in hand, and the old campaigner began to dictate, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ . . . to all God's beloved at Rome," and when Tertius toward the end ventured to slip in a word of his own, "I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord."

20

The Preacher at the Prize Fight

ONCE IN A STRANGE CITY I CAME TO A LARGE BUILDING INTO which a horde of men and some women were crowding. The attraction was a boxing match between two well-known middle-weights, and as I had some hours to spend before train time, I followed the crowd.

The idea of the preacher at a prize fight might have been slightly shocking to some of his parishioners, but he was following a most respectable example. The apostle Paul's familiarity with such affairs is evident in his letters. In the thirteen epistles ascribed to Paul there are more than twenty allusions to the games and contests of the athletic arena. There are no such allusions in the Gospels. Paul represents the Christian life by the Greek word *agone*, rendered in our English versions "conflict," "striving," "fight," or "race." He reminds Timothy that no athlete is awarded the prize unless he contends according to the rules. We wonder if this may imply that Timothy had been going a little astray.

Paul's interest in athletics and his familiarity with these rules is evident in his application of the terms and customs of the arena to the Christian life. He is as familiar with such matters as an American boy is familiar with the terms and rules of baseball. As a youngster living in a Roman garrison town his heroes would naturally be, not the saints and prophets of rabbinic lore, but the ancient equivalents of the names that are celebrated on today's sport page. When he became a man and

an apostle, he "put away childish things," but his interest in athletics did not decline. In the second letter to Timothy, assumed by tradition to have been written by the apostle from his final imprisonment, he refers to his own approaching death in the terms of the athletic arena. "I have fought the good fight," he says, "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown . . . "

In the passage I Cor. 9:24-27 there are at least nine words taken from the sporting arena. He says:

> Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to obtain a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

In addition to the athletic terms in this passage there are at least as many more to be found in Paul's letters.

"Race" is the Greek word *stadion*, originally meaning a certain distance, then the racecourse which was one stade long, and then the race itself. The Romans adopted the word and passed it on to us in our word "stadium." "Strive," *agonizomenos*, signified intense effort, the agonizing strain that is expressed in the runner's face as he puts forth his utmost power. "I fight" is literally "I use my fists." "Beating the air" is in modern ring parlance "missing," characteristic of the unskilled or tired boxer. Or it may refer to "shadowboxing," fighting an imaginary opponent, always a part of the pugilist's training.

There are two words translated "crown" in the New Testament. *Diadema* signifies the crown which is the symbol of authority. It occurs only three times, all in the book of Revela-

tion. In two instances it stands for worldly political power; in the third it is worn by him who is truly King of kings and Lord of lords. The *stephanos*, or wreath, to which Paul refers was a chaplet of leaves placed on the head of the victorious athlete and of course soon withered. Paul's "imperishable crown" was the unfading reward of the faithful. In Revelation they who come out of great tribulation cast down their imperishable wreaths before the throne. This distinction between the diadem and the chaplet, or wreath, is important because everywhere in the New Testament the reward of the faithful, enduring saint who fights the good fight is the symbol, not of authority over others, but of victory in the spiritual struggle.

The constantly recurring references to games and sports in the letters of Paul must have been the expression of an informed interest in athletics. Such an interest is not unusual in men of strong religious feeling. Henry Ward Beecher once failed to appear for a lecture. When a student was sent to his hotel, he found him immersed in a newspaper story of a prize fight in which John L. Sullivan had beaten his opponent the day before. William Lyon Phelps tells how his saintly old father, a retired Baptist minister, used to have his son read the newspaper to him when his sight was getting dim. One morning Phelps came upon the story of the championship fight of the night before and, having read the headline, was about to pass on to less worldly things. But the old man stopped him. "Read it, William," he said. "Read it round by round."

There is nothing in the New Testament to encourage the idea that the "crown of life" is to be won by noncombatant piety. Women who immure themselves in convents, pietists who spend their lives in monkish seclusion, mumbling prayers, or mystics who live in contemplation of what Otto calls the

"wholly other," may be saints indeed, and wholly admirable, but they are not the people of the New Testament.

To the early followers of Christ life was a campaign. There were difficulties, adversaries, temptations, on every hand. They "wrestled," as Paul says, against the world rulers of this present darkness in high places. He continues, taking his figures again from the arena, "Therefore take the whole armor of God, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness . . . taking the shield of faith . . . the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit." All these figures come from the arena and the gladiatorial contests.

One will look in vain for any indication that Paul practiced the contemplative devotion our fathers referred to as "meditation and prayer," and which in present-day pious jargon is "the quiet time." Paul prayed much, according to his own word, but his prayers were evidently not tranquil communions with an indulgent God but those "wrestlings in prayer" to which he called his Roman friends. "I appeal to you," he said, ". . . to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf." Here again is a word from the athletic arena *agonizomai*, a favorite with Paul, who uses it to denote the "good fight" of the Christian's life at least ten times. If the apostle ever spent a day in voluntary inactivity, his writings do not reveal it. One suspects that the Roman soldiers who guarded him in his prison days had a lively time of it.

One of the finest passages in which the athletic contest typifies the Christian life is in Heb. 12:1-2. The writer, whose identity is unknown, is hoping to revive the courage of a disheartened, fearful people. He has written in the famous eleventh chapter a review of the heroes of the past and has thrilled his readers with memories of the strivings of the noble dead. Abruptly he takes them from the "deserts and mountains, . . . dens and caves of the earth" to the athletic arena, where he

imagines the past heroes of the faith gathered, rank on rank, looking down on the conflict in which the present generation is engaged. "Therefore," he says, "since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, . . . let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." The times call for the same single-minded self-expenditure that is required of the athlete. "Let us run," he says, "looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." The word translated "pioneer" is in the old version "author," plainly a mistranslation. The word was sometimes used for "prince," sometimes for "leader," sometimes for "forerunner." It is strange that commentators have not seen that the writer is still thinking of the race. The figure in his mind is that of the pacemaker, who leads us on to the finish of the struggle. Some of us who in years of youth rode in bicycle races will recall how the whole consciousness was concentrated in the effort to follow the pacemaking wheel ahead, and will understand what the writer meant when he said, "Let us run, looking to Jesus, the [pacemaker] and [finisher] of our faith."

Jesus himself, although he spent whole nights in solitary prayer and urged his followers to find secret communion with God, represented life as a strenuous business. "Strive to enter by the narrow door," he said; "for many . . . will seek to enter and will not be able." "He who endures to the end will be saved."

The late James Moffatt began one of his sermons with the story of the philosopher Pythagoras, who was once asked what his business was in the world. He replied that at the Olympic games some came to try for the prizes, some to sell their merchandise, some to meet their friends, and some to look on. "I," he said, "am one of the those who come to look on at life." Francis Bacon commenting on the story said, "But men must

know that in this theater of man's life, it is reserved only for God and the angels to be lookers-on."

There are, of course, men and women who are compelled to bear the heavy burden of inactivity. Even to many of them life might take on new interest if they were to be inspired by the example of Paul, who suffered all his life from chronic illness, who was half blind and subject to periodic attacks of some malady to which he refers, according to our English version, as "a thorn in the flesh." "Thorn" is a weak word for the Greek *skolops*. What Paul is talking about is not the prick of a thorn, but a stabbing pain like that made by a spear or a sharp stake. Many a chronic victim to disease will know what that means.

Perhaps the psychologists will explain why such a man as Paul, prevented from childhood from engaging in those robust pastimes which boys and young men love, should have been so fond of figures drawn from athletic sports. However that may be, and however conscious of his physical disabilities he may have been, this was the man who tramped thousands of miles, endured hunger, cold, peril, and prison, preached the gospel in wild mountain regions and took it across the sea to Italy, and after a lifetime of labor, with old age closing in upon him, was still looking forward to new conquests. He had times of disheartenment when, as he wrote to Timothy, he felt that his race was run; but that was not his true conviction. From that last imprisonment he wrote to his Philippian friends:

> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own. . . . I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

He was still thinking of the athletic field and the reward of the successful competitor.

He was, after all, one of the great athletes of all time, taunted by his enemies with the weakness of his "bodily presence," crying out to God for relief from pain, yet pressing on toward the attainment of the "prize of the upward call," the "unfading crown of glory." None of us will doubt that he received it.

21

The Doctor Tells the Story

In recent years doctors have been writing something besides prescriptions. They have gone in for authorship, written memoirs, literary criticism, and fiction, have conducted newspaper columns, and altogether have broken into the field of literature in a big way.

The literary doctor is nothing new. Rabelais was a doctor; so were Oliver Goldsmith, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Weir Mitchell, and Conan Doyle. The greatest of them all was a Greek physician who wrote two books, sometime after the middle of the first century, which soon became "best sellers" and have remained so ever since. His name was Luke, and his books were the Gospel According to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

All the writers of the New Testament were Jews except Dr. Luke. He was a Greek. His name, Luke, or Lucas, is a diminutive of Lucanus. Being Roman it suggests that he was the son of a Greek freedman of a Roman master. Probably his father was a physician also. These are, of course, guesses, but they are in accord with the customs of the times. Doctoring was something of a monopoly among the Greeks and was likely to be handed down from father to son.

We are not told how the apostle Paul and this young doctor chanced to meet, but we can imagine how it must have happened. Paul was up in the north country, either on his way to Troas or in the city with his helpers Timothy and Silas.

For years he had suffered from recurrent attacks of illness which racked him with pain, a stabbing agony like a thorn or "pointed stake" in his flesh. He had tramped over mountain trails, had endured hunger and cold until his strength was gone, and now at the very time when he was anxious to get on with his work he was laid low. Perhaps it was at this time that, as he wrote afterward, "Three times I besought the Lord . . . that it should leave me."

In any case help came. Those northern people understood and loved this fiery little genius. They were a wayward people, full of superstition and at times a trial to him, but they loved him. "If possible," he said when an attack left him half blind, "you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me." Perhaps they did a better thing in sending Dr. Luke to him. One may imagine that first meeting, perhaps in a darkened room, when the young physician's cool fingers touched the apostle's aching eyes, and his calm Greek voice spoke to him; and Paul found the great friendship of his life.

They were as unlike as such friends often are. Their backgrounds were entirely different. Paul's education was classical and theological; Luke's was scientific. Paul was a thoroughbred Jew; Luke was a Greek. Yet their souls were bound together in that hour, and toward the close of his life, when Paul's enemies seemed to have triumphed and he was in prison waiting for death, he wrote to Timothy urging him to come and bear him company. He was lonely, but not yet quite alone. "At my first defense no one took my part." "Demas . . . has deserted me." "Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm." "Luke alone is with me." It is a great thing to have a friend who stands by you to the end. Such was Dr. Luke.

Putting away our habit of thinking of these New Testament people as "saints," and remembering that they were real men and women who had jobs, reared families, and were not differ-

ent from ourselves, we think of this young physician answering an emergency call to relieve a man in pain and then sitting, as doctors often do, talking quietly while he gives his treatment time to take effect. From that hour these two men were lifelong friends, comrades, and fellow workers.

Dr. Luke gave up his practice and joined Paul, the missionary. Do we think that strange? Think of Grenfell, Oxford graduate, a young physician with fine prospects, leaving London to heal the sick on the barren coast of Labrador; or of Schweitzer giving up his theological professorship and his fame as an organist and subjecting himself to the rigorous discipline of a medical education in order to go to a remote region in Africa to serve as a medical missionary. Dr. Luke, writer of the Gospel and the Book of Acts, was precisely such a man, raised up by God for work that must be done.

If you will read the sixteenth chapter of Acts and exercise the deductive skill resultant from your reading of Sherlock Holmes and his followers, you will discover where it was that the young Greek doctor joined the Pauline missionary party. Nowhere in either of his books does he mention himself, yet we are not left in doubt. It was at Troas. Some have conjectured that Luke was the human influence who turned Paul's thoughts to Macedonia and the planting of the Church in Europe.

However that may be, there was a sudden change in plans after this meeting of Paul and Luke. Paul had intended to go into Bithynia. He would have enjoyed that, for Bithynia was one of those centers of Greco-Roman civilization for which he had a liking. Instead he sailed across the Aegean Sea, making, as Luke tells the story, "a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony." When the apostle Paul and Dr. Luke stepped

on board that little ship, a mark was made on the history of mankind, and the gospel of Christ went across the sea.

This was the man who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. He went about the task of writing as you would expect a scientific man to do. He wanted the facts. In his little prefaces to his Gospel and the Acts he tells how he took account of all that had been written, along with eyewitness accounts from men and women who had been with Jesus. It was his purpose, as he said, "to write an orderly account." He was the first historian of the Church. His books are full of medical terms, and he often includes a diagnosis in narratives where the sick are concerned. Always he presents the Greek point of view, tolerant and cosmopolitan. And he gives us some of the loveliest passages in all literature.

Peter and even Paul himself could never quite shake off the old Jewish inhibitions and the old class consciousness with which they had been brought up. To men like Luke these things meant little. Although Jesus was a Jew trained from his childhood in the rabbinical tradition, his mind was amazingly free from Jewish prejudices. Much of his teaching might have come straight from the Greek philosophers. Thus it might be that a man of Luke's training could accept and act upon the precepts of Christ with less mental readjustment than would be necessary in the case of an orthodox Jew.

So the doctor tells the story. We take our New Testament and read his two books, not a chapter at a time, but the whole thing together. With all its suggestion of divine influence it is a profoundly human story. And we remember that the writer was no "saint" as saints are represented in religious art and literature, but just a doctor, like that young doctor up the street. It will be only as we thus think of him that we shall truly understand the story he told.

22

The First New Testament Critic

THE FIRST OF ALL THE NEW TESTAMENT CRITICS WAS LUKE, THE beloved physician and author of the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles.

To many people the word "criticism" as applied to the Bible is objectionable. When the adjective "higher" is added to it, they become passionate in their antagonism. The term "higher criticism" is one of the stupidities of scholarship. It is meaningless and misleading and is now, happily, on the way to obsolescence.

Criticism, as the word is understood by all but the consciously cultured, is the pronouncing of judgments concerning the excellence and value of the thing criticized. When Arnold Bennett said that the fortieth chapter of Isaiah was the finest of all poems, he uttered a critical judgment. It should not have mattered to him whether it was written by a man called Isaiah in the eighth century before Christ or by a man named John Smith the day before yesterday. He was appraising it as a piece of literature according to its merit. That is what most people expect criticism to do.

The biblical scholarship that is called criticism, however, has nothing to do with the merits of the Bible books. Its business is to discover, if possible, who wrote them, what were the exact words he wrote, when they were written, and what were the circumstances that occasioned the writing. In this sense Luke was the first of the New Testament critics.

Luke was a careful student of the sources of the story of Jesus. He himself announces the fact. In his prologue to the Gospel he says:

> Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

That is the ultimate, legitimate purpose of all New Testament scholarship.

If we examine Luke's statement word by word, it becomes clear that he thought of his undertaking as a painstaking responsibility. He was to consider both written documents and the verbal accounts of eyewitnesses. All four of the Gospels show evidence that their authors were acquainted with and made use of earlier written narratives. As to eyewitnesses Paul reminds his readers that a great many persons who had seen the risen Jesus were still living when he wrote his letter to the church at Corinth. Luke's stay at the home of Philip[1] and his friendship with men like Silas must have furnished him with important information about the beginnings of the Church. He must have had many such opportunities to obtain firsthand information concerning the life and teachings of Jesus.

That Luke was acquainted with the Gospel of Mark, or with an early draft of it, seems certain. It is generally agreed that Mark's account was the earliest of the four. Luke and Mark agree so closely in long passages as to indicate the dependence

[1] See Acts 6:5; 21:8.

of one upon the other. Luke also made use of material which was also used by the author of the Gospel of Matthew. From other sources he drew about one half of his material—incidents and teachings which are not found in either Matthew or Mark. Thus he had sources of information which Matthew and Mark either did not have or chose not to use. Luke alone tells us of the visit of the shepherds to the birthplace of Jesus and of the family pilgrimage from Nazareth to Jerusalem when he was twelve years old. It is from him that we have the great hymns of the Nativity, which are markedly Hebrew in style and construction and were probably first composed in that language. In all there are about forty passages, including miracles, teachings, incidents, and parables, to be found only in Luke's account.

Before Luke began to write his "orderly account," he must have carefully collated his materials, manuscripts and the notes he had taken of oral testimonies and personal conversations. That he kept a diary is evident from the way the book of Acts is composed. Certainly he would enter upon his work with a profound sense of responsibility. Among all the Gospel writers we should expect him to feel the need of such a book as he undertook to write, for his work with Paul was often among people who had no knowledge of the Jewish faith. To tell the people of the Macedonian hills that Jesus was the promised Messiah, with appropriate arguments from the prophets, was not enough. They needed a circumstantial account. In order to furnish it Luke had to do precisely what the New Testament critic of today has to do.

When the famous Dutch scholar Erasmus prepared the first printed edition of the Greek New Testament, in 1511, he had only half a dozen manuscripts, only one of early date and none of them complete. Luke must have had better ones of such parts of the New Testament as existed in his time. It is not un-

likely that some of the material Luke used was included in those books and parchments which Paul was so anxious to have brought to him from Troas.[2]

The task of the scholar of today is far more complicated than was Luke's, but it is essentially the same. He must collate the ancient manuscripts, although none of them, of course, are the originals. He considers the ancient translations, Latin, Syriac, and Egyptian. He consults the early Christian Fathers, who sometimes quoted from manuscripts earlier than any we now possess. From all these he produces what he believes to be the nearest to the words of the original writers. He may be a saint or a skeptic. His purpose may be constructive or destructive, radical or conservative, but if he follows Luke's method, so carefully outlined at the beginning of the Gospel, he is a New Testament critic. (The difference between the old King James Version of 1611 and the modern versions is due mainly to two circumstances. One is the discovery of earlier and better manuscripts than were known in the time of King James. The other is the more accurate knowledge scholars now possess of the Greek spoken in the time of the apostle.)

One of the few great manuscripts which are the chief authorities for our modern text was not brought to light until 1859. The story of its discovery is one of the romances of biblical scholarship. In 1844 the famous German scholar Tischendorf visited the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. Working in the library there he chanced to notice a basket full of old manuscript leaves. When he inquired, he was told that such stuff had been used to stoke the furnace. From among this trash he rescued forty-three leaves of the Greek Old Testament. These he was permitted to take back to Europe with him. Nine years later he returned, hoping for more good

[2] See II Tim. 4:13.

fortune; but the monks were suspicious, and he found nothing. In 1859 he returned once more. There was no result until a few days before he was to leave when he showed the steward of the monastery a copy of the Septuagint, or Greek Old Testament. "Ah," said the steward, "I also have a copy of that book." He took Tischendorf to his room and produced a bundle of leaves wrapped in a cloth. There lay one of the most valuable prizes in the world, a large part of the Old Testament and the New Testament complete, dating from the middle of the fourth century and one of the most important manuscripts yet discovered. As Tischendorf was working under the patronage of Czar Alexander of Russia, protector of the Greek church, the precious manuscript was finally presented to the Czar. When the new revolutionary government in Russia was in need of money in 1933, the British bought it for about half a million dollars and installed it in the British Museum.

These great manuscripts are written on vellum and are in "codex," or book form, as distinguished from the "rolls" of earlier times.[3] Within very recent times thousands of documents written on papyrus, the paper of the ancients, have been found. In 1895 only one biblical manuscript on papyrus was known to exist. Now there are scores of parts and fragments, some of them earlier than any copy of the New Testament then available.

The oldest bit of the New Testament is a tiny triangular scrap of papyrus, about 3½ by 2½ inches in size, with writing on both sides. It contains a few words of the eighteenth chap-

[3] The manuscript from which Jesus read in the synagogue (Luke 4:16) was not a "book" as we understand the word, but a roll or scroll. The word *biblion* might mean either, but Luke says that when he finished reading the manuscript, he *rolled it up*. Our English versions do not make this clear.

ter of John. "It is," said Sir Frederick Kenyon, "in a hand which can be confidently assigned to the first half of the second century." Handwriting changes from generation to generation. Just as one can distinguish the writing of Americans of 1850 from that of 1900 and the writing of today's high-school boys from either, so the expert can date an ancient manuscript.

Most of these ancient writings have to do with the common, daily life of the people. There are bills and business letters, love letters, diplomatic papers, government reports, and miscellany such as might pass through post offices any day. It is from these that scholars have learned much concerning Greek usage in the time of the apostles. Spoken Greek changed from the time of Plato to the time of Paul, as English has changed from the time of Chaucer to our own day. Except for the well-educated, the people for whom Luke wrote his Gospel would have found it nearly as difficult to read the great classics of Greek poetry and philosophy, written four or five centuries before their time, as would an Athenian of today. The New Testament was not written in literary Greek, but in the language of the people. One may see the difference illustrated in the change of style from Luke's introductory statement to the flowing narrative that follows.[4]

A simple example of the light these recent discoveries has thrown on the language may be seen in Paul's letter to the Philippians. He is thinking in terms of business accountancy. He considers profit and loss, counting nothing gained which does not advance his knowledge of Christ. In the old translation he says, "No church communicated with me as concerning

[4] Luke's Greek is not that of the classic historians, but it is more literary than that of the other Gospels. He had the vocabulary of an educated man of his time and used more than seven hundred words not found elsewhere in the New Testament.

giving and receiving, but ye only." The Revised Standard Version has it, "No church entered into partnership with me." Both versions make the apostle say that he seeks, not a gift, but the "fruit" which "abounds," or "increases," to their credit. Moffatt, guided by the new knowledge of usage, made it, "It is not the money I am anxious for; what I am anxious for is the interest that accumulates in this way to your divine credit." So we might render the famous "think on these things" passage,[5] "Calculate these things among your assets."

Writing the story of the Last Supper, Luke had to choose among slightly varying reports of the order of events and the words of Jesus. The first written records of the ministry of Jesus were probably accounts of the Passion week. If he had Mark's Gospel before him, he deliberately departed from it for reasons that must have seemed good. Surely in writing such a story such a man would make the utmost endeavor to give the most accurate account possible. In any case it differs from that of Mark.

In the light of the little preface to the Gospel we may think of Luke as studying his material, considering the authorship of the "many" accounts which had been in circulation, with reference to the opportunity of the writers to secure the exact facts, keeping an alert watch for errors in copying, and arriving at a narrative which has often been called "the most beautiful book in the world." Up to the time he did the actual writing Luke's task was the task of the New Testament critic.

Part of the difficulty of the New Testament scholar's task is due to the fact that in addition to the disagreements among the four Gospels there are variations among the best ancient manuscripts of a particular book. For instance, we do not know

[5] Phil. 4:8. The word is *logizomai*, used frequently by Paul and best rendered "calculate," "reckon," or "count up."

just what Jesus said to the rich young ruler, who according to the most familiar version ran to him and said, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" In the King James Version the three synoptists agree that Jesus said, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God." But there is disagreement among the manuscripts of Matthew, and the recent versions agree in rendering the young man's question, "What good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" And the answer of Jesus, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one good thing to do if you would enter life: Keep the commandments." It was the answer he gave to the lawyer who came to him with the same question and who drew from him the beautiful parable of the good Samaritan.

There are hundreds of such variations in the ancient sources from which we get our text of the New Testament. Dr. Hort of Cambridge University, who was joint editor of the Greek Testament with Bishop Westcott and who worked on its text for thirty years, estimated that these differences constituted about one eighth of the book. But, he added, what might be considered important discrepancies "can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text."

Why then do scholars spend lifetimes studying the ancient texts, searching out every minute difference? If these variations are unimportant, why bother? Luke, the beloved physician, would answer these questions. He and the "critic" have the same thing in mind. This is the most important story in the world. It contains a revelation of divine truth in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. No pains can be too great in the effort to make available to everybody, in the most accurate form that is possible, "a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word."

23

The Four Witnesses

At various times during the latter half of the first century four men undertook to write the story of Jesus. Two wrote from the recollection of events in which they had taken part. One was a younger man, whose mother may have been one of the women who followed Jesus and who "ministered unto him of their substance." And one was a Greek doctor, who began his book with the statement that "many have undertaken to compile a narrative," that he had "followed all things closely for some time past," and that he proposed to write "an orderly account," so that the reader might "know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed."

We thus have four accounts of the life and work of Jesus. each one reflecting very clearly the personality of the man who wrote it. It would be hard to find four men less like one another in temperament, background, or circumstance. The Gospel of Matthew reflects the method and deliberation of a careful man; Mark betrays the eagerness of one who does not think too long before he acts. Luke is the work of a warm-hearted, compassionate physician. John reveals the profound, brooding thought of a devout spirit who had pondered long upon the mystery of Christ.

One of the marks of genuineness in these four accounts is the way in which they differ one from the others. If four witnesses appeared in court to testify concerning a series of

unusual and exciting events, and if their stories agreed in every detail, any judge would suspect collusion and perhaps perjury. As John reminds us several times in his Gospel, these men were witnesses, each one telling the story as he saw it happening, or as he drew it from others who were eyewitnesses. Thus we have four portraits of Jesus, no two alike, no two agreeing in all details, yet all unmistakably the portrayal of a living person, so vividly presented that nearly twenty centuries after his death we know him more intimately than we know any other character in history.

The Gospel of Mark is generally believed to have been the first of the four versions of Christ's life in the New Testament. It was not the earliest of the New Testament writings, for it is probable that all of Paul's letters were written and some of them circulated among the churches before any of the four Gospels were completed.

There must have been, however, written accounts of some of Christ's teachings and some of the events of his ministry before any part of the New Testament as we now have it was produced. Not only is this a reasonable assumption, but it is plainly implied in the opening sentences of the Gospel of Luke.

Eusebius, the historian, who wrote about the year 300, quoted an earlier authority, Papias, who lived at a time when it was still possible to meet men who had known surviving members of the apostolic circle. Papias wrote:

> Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he told him, without, however, recording in order what was said or done by Christ. For neither did he hear the Lord, nor did he follow him, but afterwards, as I have said, he was with Peter, who adapted his teachings to people's needs but had no design of giving a connected account of the Lord's words.

This would be consistent with the theory that Mark, under the influence of Peter, was the first of the four, for Peter was the kind of man to get things done. It would explain the style of the narrative, its many little enlivening details, its headlong rush from one event to another, and the lifelikeness of the scenes in which Peter had a part. There is a dynamic quality in the book, and a rapidity of movement, which might have suggested, without the testimony of Papias, that Peter had a hand in writing it.

Mark gives us a vivid account, full of little colorful touches which help us to see in imagination the scenes the writer is describing. For instance, in the story of the feeding of the five thousand there are two examples of this graphic quality in two successive sentences. Matthew and John mention that the people sat on the grass. Mark says they sat down "by companies on the *green* grass." Then follows a delightfully vivid expression. They sat down, says Mark, *prasiai prasiai.* Our English versions render it "ranks" or "groups," but the Greek word, found nowhere else in the New Testament, is used in the Septuagint to denote the way in which flowers are planted in a garden bed. Such touches of color are characteristic of Mark.

Mark had both a Roman and a Jewish name and is sometimes called John Mark. This was not uncommon, especially among prosperous Jewish families whose business relations influenced them in stepping over the line separating Jew from Gentile. His mother, one of the eight women named Mary in the New Testament, was evidently a person of means. That her house in Jerusalem was a meeting place for the early followers of Jesus is indicated in the book of Acts. It may have been in the "large upper room" in her house that Jesus met with his disciples for the Last Supper. Here too the larger company may have met on the day of Pentecost. We know

that later when Peter was released from the jail, he made straight for Mary's house, where he found "many were gathered together and were praying." From the account in the twelfth chapter of Acts one gets the impression that it was an establishment of some size. The family seems to have been well-to-do. We are told that Barnabas, Mark's kinsman, had been a landowner in Cyprus.

When Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch from Judea, where they had been sent by the Christians with money for the relief of the famine sufferers, they brought Mark with them. When they set out on their first missionary journey, Mark went along as a helper. All went well until, leaving the familiar ground of Cyprus, they sailed across to the less civilized country of Pamphylia. There "John left them and returned to Jerusalem." When a second journey was planned, Barnabas insisted that Mark should accompany them again, but Paul wanted no nephews, or cousins, on this tour through strange country, which was likely to call for more courage and perseverance than the first. "And there arose a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away into Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed. . . . And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches." It was neither the first nor the last time the bringing of family relationships into an enterprise has ended in a breakup.

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four. He tells his story briefly and straightforwardly. It "marches," as the French would say. There is in it none of the mysticism of John, little of the compassionate humanity that pervades Luke's Gospel, and still less of the preoccupation with Old Testament prophecy that is characteristic of Matthew.

Matthew's Gospel is the most Jewish of the four. This may seem strange in view of the fact that its writer was a publican

and a social outcast among the Jews. We know that Matthew was a tax collector, not because he is called a publican, for others who served the Romans were probably so called, but because he is "sitting at the tax office" when we first meet him. Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* quotes Papias as saying, "Matthew then, in the Hebrew language, compiled the teachings, while they were interpreted by each man according to his ability." The strong Jewish emphasis and the form in which the book was written might seem to bear this out, but expert scholars tell us that the work shows clear evidence of having been composed in Greek. It may be that the relation of the book to Matthew is much the same as that of Mark's book to Peter. Justin, about the middle of the second century, called Mark's Gospel "the memoirs of Peter." If we assume that an associate of Matthew used his Hebrew, or Aramaic, account of Jesus as the basis of an elaborated account, written in Greek, we may not be far from the fact. There is, of course, no indication in the book itself as to its authorship.

Matthew does not like the Pharisees, and they receive rough treatment from him. The Pharisees, of course, would not like Matthew, for they were particularly down upon collaborators with the Roman power. Yet Matthew is a thoroughgoing Jew. More than sixty-five times he quotes the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that in him the promise of the prophets was fulfilled. He has an orderly mind, as one would expect from a man in his business, and his material is arranged in compact groups, a section of teachings followed by a group of miracles in turn followed by a group of parables. The Sermon on the Mount is a collection of sayings on practical ethics, in form like the "wisdom" literature that was so popular among the Jews. It is a combination of practical wisdom and exalted faith.

The great storyteller of the New Testament is Luke. Mat-

thew gives us many illustrations of divine truth drawn from common experience or the laws of nature, but Luke's parables are marvelously wrought little dramas. No one has equaled the sheer artistry of such parables as the prodigal son or the good Samaritan. Luke is a master of what newspapermen call the "human interest story." In these times the word "sentiment" is somewhat in disrepute, but sentiment was a large factor in Luke's character. None but he could have told in the Acts the lovely little story of Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders. Mark presents Jesus as the "strong Son of God," as Tennyson phrases it. To him Jesus is the driving, majestic campaigner. Luke sees Jesus more as the compassionate "Son of man," the champion of the underdog, the understanding friend of women, and the Saviour of the thief on the cross.

The Gospel of John is the mystery book of the New Testament. Even the most cocksure critic becomes diffident when dealing with its authorship and date. All agree that it is the latest of the four. It is certain that no part of the New Testament was better known, nor more highly valued, by the early Church. It is said that there are at least nineteen references to John in the Christian literature of the second century.

Until about 1820 it was the accepted tradition that the Fourth Gospel was written by John, the son of Zebedee and one of the first followers of Jesus. By the end of the century scholars were telling us that it could not have been written by him and that it was not produced until the middle of the second century. Since then critical opinion has turned back, fulfilling the prophecy of William Sanday, written in 1891:

> If the inquiries which are now in progress should have the result which seems very possible, three consequences will follow: The view which places the composition of the Gospel in the second century will be clearly untenable; it will be established that the Gospel had its origin in some leading Christian circle

at the time tradition assigns to it; it will be increasingly probable that its author was St. John.

How accurate Dr. Sanday's foresight was is indicated by the remark of Ernest F. Scott in his *Literature of the New Testament*, published in 1932, that "the old view has so much in its favor that it has never ceased to maintain itself," that the theory that the book belongs to the middle of the second century "can no longer be maintained," and that "a strong case can be built up for the Johannine authorship." [1]

There is little in John of the practical ethical teaching of Jesus that is so much a part of Matthew's book, but there is a great deal of interpretation of the nature and work of Christ. Mark seems to be most interested in what Jesus did, Matthew in what Jesus taught. John, even when reporting the words of Jesus, seems to penetrate into his thoughts. The whole of John's book impresses us as the work of a man who had been an eyewitness, present during long periods of Christ's ministry. During many years of service in teaching and preaching the new faith he had read much and thought much concerning the strange and lovely being he had "heard" and "seen" and "touched." Now in his old age he writes a book in which his memories are screened through the experience of a long life. According to his own statement he tells only a small part of the story of Jesus. "But these [things] are written," he says, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

These are the four witnesses. One was a Jew employed by some Roman politician, who obtained a profitable government

[1] In his more recent book *The Purpose of the Gospels*, published in 1949, Scott says, "No doubt is any longer possible that the Fourth Gospel was written very shortly after the others and was accepted along with them as genuine history."

concession as collector of taxes. One, the son of a wealthy woman, got much of his information concerning Jesus while acting as companion and assistant to Peter. One was a Greek doctor, the friend and companion of Paul, who undertook to write a connected narrative of the life of Jesus from various eyewitness and documentary accounts. And one was an old man to whom the external event was of less importance than the inner meaning and who was the first of all the Christian mystics.

For four such men, so different in temperament and circumstance, to record in anything like identical terms the exciting events through which Jesus and his companions passed would be impossible. That is the reason why no complete "harmony of the Gospels" can ever be made. Yet the portrait of Jesus is clear. The endless controversies and the tragic blunders of the Church have been due to neglect of the four Gospels, not to any want of unity in their account of the character and teaching of Christ. There would have been no massacre on St. Bartholomew's Day, no burnings of Savonarola, Huss, or Servetus if men in their zeal for theological conformity and ecclesiastical power had not forgotten the Jesus portrayed by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

We cannot study these four little books without yielding more and more to the conviction that they whose testimony they record "speak of what [they] know, and bear witness to what [they] have seen." In the words of the Dutch scholar Isaak Da Costa, who wrote on these matters a century ago:

> When the examination of the four Gospels shall have demonstrated to us that the variations and differences are in exact proportion and necessary relation with the special character and particular plan of each of the respective writers, we find no difficulty in arriving at such an agreement among the four com-

positions as, while it preserves these differences, will be found to result in the most perfect expression of the truth, rendered by each from his own particular point of view, and equally just and true.[2]

The best defense of the four Gospels is the evident honesty of the men who wrote them.

[2] Da Costa, *The Four Witnesses* (1851).

24

The Saints and the Enduring Church

When in the fullness of the time "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God," he brought to the world a new idea. It was the Christian revelation of the worth, the capacity, and the destiny of the individual soul. The teaching of Jesus concerning God is more than foreshadowed in the writings of the prophets; it is explicitly set forth; but the New Testament doctrine of man is revolutionary. Paul summed it up when he said, "There cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all." And again, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ." To such a view of the nature of man and of his relation to his fellow man the institutions of the world were and for the most part still are in deadly opposition.

It was not for any heresy concerning the being and attributes of God that Jesus was cast out of the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth. During the first part of his address the people were charmed. "All spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth," says Luke. It was when he began to talk about a heathen widow and a Syrian soldier and to intimate that God might pass by respectable Jews in favor of such people that they "were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city."

Many times in the course of the Church's history have the forces gathered which would cast out of the world forever this disturbing Christ with his doctrines of human freedom, equality, and brotherhood. But no prejudice of race against race, no greed for wealth nor lust for power, no folly, corruption, nor betrayal has been enough to banish from the hearts of men the hope that was engendered by that teaching. It was the historian of the Roman Empire, Gibbon, who said that Christianity endured through the centuries of persecution because it brought hope to men when hope was the one thing needed if civilization was to endure.

When Jesus stood with his company of disciples and said, "I will build my church," there stood before him the only material available with which to establish his kingdom on earth. "On this rock," he said, "I will build." To anyone who knew those men the founding of an institution on their courage or constancy might seem as doubtful an enterprise as that of the man who built his house on the shifting sand. Again and again they had failed him. They were quarrelsome, "slow of heart to believe," and when the "hour" had struck and the crucial test came, "they all forsook him, and fled." Among them all, according to the record, Peter was the most unstable in temperament and his character the least rocklike. Yet these men were the stuff of which the Church of Christ, which should withstand "the gates of hell," was made.

The Church was never built on the courage, loyalty, nor wisdom of men. It rests, not on man's character, but on his need, not on his achievement, but on his aspiration. It has endured and conquered because in the wavering Peters, the doubting Thomases, the uncomprehending Philips, the Mary Magdalenes—in all of us alike—there is that which sin can never overcome. It is the unquenchable aspiration of the soul toward God. The wise old worldling of the book of Ec-

clesiastes had a glimpse of the truth on which Jesus based his teaching and on which he established his Church when he said, "He hath set eternity in their heart."

Peter remembered those words, "On this rock I will build," and passed them on years later to the "displaced persons" of the time, "the exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappodocia, Asia and Bythinia." "Come to him, to that living stone," he said, ". . . and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house." It was on the lives of sinners that the church of the saints was built. Its foundation consists, not of the piety and virtues of a few spiritual aristocrats, but of the multitude of "all sorts and conditions of men" created in the image of God and alike in the one respect that there is in them all an ineradicable instinct that points toward their creator.

Thus the saints of the New Testament, and through all the centuries of Christian history, have been no coterie elected by powers on earth to be favorites of heaven, but the rank and file of ordinary folk who have been "cut to the heart" as were the people in the crowd to whom Peter preached on the day of Pentecost and who with humble trust in the grace of God have undertaken the adventure of Christian faith. It was Professor T. W. Glover of Cambridge University who once remarked that the early Christians conquered because they outthought, outspoke, outlived, and, when occasion arose, outdied the pagan people of the Roman world. Next to Christ's consciousness that he was called to that mysterious "hour" when he would make "peace by the blood of his cross," the purpose of his life, pursued with infinite patience, was to teach men and women thus to think, and speak, and live, and die.

We of this generation stand as men stood in New Testament times, at a crisis in history. The legions of Caesar have

been marching, and again have Herod's soldiers made slaughter of the innocents. There are among us doubts and fears. Many of the things in which our fathers trusted have failed us, and we are disappointed, disheartened, and afraid. The men and women who founded the churches in which most of us worship would never have believed that such a world as ours could be.

Yet with us, as with the people of the time of Christ, there is still faith in God and still hope for the redemption of mankind. And, such as the world is and such as we are, the faith of Christ must still be preached and carried on to conquest if men are not to sink back into enslaved paganism.

There are not many of us who really think too well of ourselves. However we may seem to strut and brag and feel superior, we all know that we must fall back at last on the prayer of the publican, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." Perhaps most of us would add to it, "Lord, be merciful to me a fool." Yet so far as human agency is concerned, the kingdom of Christ on earth rests on the imperfect lives of imperfect people, like us. And though we may have played, as Peter did, the coward; though we have failed to do what we ought to have done and have done what we ought not; though there be not one of us to whom Christ can proudly point when Annas asks, "What of your disciples?" it may yet be true that, like multitudes of sinful men and women, we can truly say as Peter said, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

Such through all the centuries have been the saints without halos, the "living stones" of the enduring Church.

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